How Central Office Administrators Organize Their Work In Support Of Marginalized Student Populations: Communication and Language Use In A Turnaround District

Author: Christina Desmond Palmer

BOSTON COLLEGE
Lynch School of Education

Department of
Education and Higher Education

Professional School Administrator Program (PSAP)

HOW CENTRAL OFFICE ADMINISTRATORS ORGANIZE THEIR WORK IN SUPPORT OF MARGINALIZED STUDENT POPULATIONS:
COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE USE IN A TURNAROUND DISTIRCT

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CHRISTINA D. PALMER

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Hugh T. Galligan, Julie R. Kukenberger, and Kathleen M. Smith

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Abstract

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CHRISTINA D. PALMER

Purpose and Research Questions: To understand central office leadership, it is necessary to examine how language grounds leaders' actions, and influences their effectiveness among themselves and with stakeholders, including other central office leaders, building principals, teachers, community and students. This study explores the relationship between central office administrators' language and their support of historically marginalized students. Looking closely at how language shows commonality or disconnect in understanding and action, this study is guided by the following research questions: (1) What language do leaders use to talk about their work with marginalized populations? (2) How does this language influence practice?

Methods: This qualitative case study analyzes with the use of discourse analysis the language of central office administrators and their work in support of historically marginalized populations, using semi-structured interviews, and document review to answer the aforementioned research questions. This is one section of a larger research project studying how central office administrators organize their work in support of marginalized populations.

Findings: Turnaround districts such as the district in this case study face complex and urgent issues, which seem to influence the language central office administrator's use. In this study, central office administrators expressed language of frustration to talk about lack of time. Second, central office administrators used language that either recognized or demonstrated implicit bias in what marginalized populations heard or saw. Third, central office administrators relied on expressions of mandated language when they communicated about their work in support of

marginalized populations, and lastly, central office administrators used language of care to talk about why they worked in a turnaround district.

Significance: Given the importance of communication in district leadership, practitioners should work to establish and integrate consistent language into practice. Researchers will find it a valuable contribution to examine the outcomes of central office administrators' language use in supporting traditionally marginalized student populations, as research is limited.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement and Research Question

School districts are responsible for creating the conditions for *all* students to be successful in school. As a result, educational leaders must consider the needs of *all* students when making leadership decisions. Of particular importance is the impact that these decisions have on historically marginalized populations, to assure that long lasting achievement and equity gaps do not persist. For the purpose of this study we include students of color, students with disabilities, low income students, and culturally and linguistically diverse students in our definition of traditionally marginalized populations, but it is important to note that there are many other populations that would be considered traditionally marginalized in U.S. public schools, including those who have been discriminated against based on sexual orientation or religion. Traditionally marginalized students have historically been underserved in American schools, and, as a result, are more likely to struggle academically and have an increased chance of dropping out of school (Gleason, 2010; Ryan, 2015). Given the increasingly diverse United States population (U.S Census, 2013), and school achievement as a predictor of engaged citizenship, wages earned, and later quality of life (Ferguson, 2014; Rodriguez, Jones, Tittmann, & Wagman, 2015), it is critical that educational leaders improve student outcomes by prioritizing the needs of traditionally marginalized students (Ferguson, 2014; Theoharis, 2007).

In recent years, numerous educational policies and reform efforts have aimed to support marginalized populations and narrow long-standing achievement and equity gaps in American schools (Trujillo & Woulfin, 2014). Some of the most influential and recent changes have emphasized educational accountability in an effort to ensure both equity and achievement

(Capper & Young, 2015). One such policy that significantly impacted schools is No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Authorized in January 2002, NCLB reflected the federal government's effort to improve performance and diminish achievement gaps of historically marginalized populations. The broad goal was to raise the achievement of all students, with a particular emphasis on underperforming subgroups (Brown, 2010), and to mandate districts to improve schools' performance. Under NCLB, improvement was measured based on the results of yearly, standardized assessments. While there are numerous ways for students to show what they know and are able to do, and the results of standardized assessments is only one measurement, the mandate to demonstrate improvement on high-stakes tests challenged superintendents to figure out how to improve scores. This represented a shift in the work practices and capacity of central office administrators who had previously focused largely on business and compliance functions. In order to thrive, organizations must learn and adapt (Edmondson, 2012); as school districts are no exception, they faced increased pressure to improve student achievement (Honig, 2014).

As public schools in the United States continue to serve a more diverse population and districts face pressure to improve their performance, district leaders must think strategically about how to organize their work to support historically marginalized populations, and in some cases, modify their work practices. Researchers have identified some ways that educational leaders and teachers organize their work to support marginalized students (Honig & Hatch, 2004; Honig, 2006; Trujillo & Wolfin, 2014), but much of the existing research describes the role of building level leaders, such as principals and teacher leaders, and classroom teachers. Limited research focuses on the specific practices of central office administrators that work to support historically marginalized students, and little attention has been given to district level activities

that promote effective schools and lead to improved student outcomes (Murphy & Hallinger, 1988). The overarching aim of this study was to narrow this research gap by describing central office administrators' leadership actions and practices as a school district works to educate and improve outcomes for historically marginalized populations. Specifically, we answered the following research question: *How do central office administrators organize their work in support of traditionally marginalized student populations?*

While many factors influence student outcomes, we identified four practices we predicted central office administrators would use as they work to improve outcomes for marginalized students. First, we investigated how central office administrators collaborated with one another to expand knowledge and build individuals' capacities. Second, we focused on communication and the ways central office administrators used language about historically marginalized populations. Third, we investigated how central office administrators interpreted and implemented policy mandates that are largely intended to improve educational outcomes for traditionally marginalized students. Fourth, we explored central office administrators' social network ties and to whom they turned for advice.

While superintendents must be chief executive officers of school districts, to improve student outcomes at scale they must also rely on the collective knowledge and judgment of central office colleagues (Murphy & Hallinger, 1988). For the purpose of this study, we defined outcomes broadly, borrowing from research on student learning outcomes at the university level. These outcomes included what students have learned, the knowledge and skill levels achieved, and a student's potential for future learning (Barr & Tagg, 1995). The four practices outlined enabled us to examine the ways central office administrators learned together and organized their work to improve outcomes across a school district. This study adds to the

research on school improvement and provides insight for researchers and practitioners alike on the role of central office administrators in district-wide improvement, with a particular emphasis on improving outcomes for historically marginalized populations. Describing how four specific practices are utilized in one district is useful, as it offers practitioners approaches they can apply and integrate into daily practice as they work to improve learning outcomes for historically marginalized students. Additionally, researchers may find it a valuable contribution to the research discussion on effective practices for district leaders who are educating an increasingly diverse student population and working to reduce achievement gaps.

In this study, each author presented a chapter that addressed a complementary research question, literature review, methods, findings, and discussion. Table 1 outlines each author's individual chapter and corresponding conceptual frameworks used to analyze the study.

Table 1

Individual Research Topics

Conceptual Framework	Investigator	ResearchQuestion
Communities of Practice	Kathleen Smith	How do communities of practice emerge within the central office when working to improve outcomes for historically marginalized students? What conditions foster or hinder administrator collaboration?
Social Justice Leadership-Language Awareness	Christina Palmer	What language do leaders use to talk about their work with marginalized populations? How does this language influence practice?
Co-construction	Hugh Galligan	In what ways are central office administrators working together to implement policy in support of traditionally marginalized students? How do central office administrators balance external policy demands with internal goals when implementing policy in support of traditionally marginalized students?
Social Network Theory	Julie Kukenberger	How do social networks between and among district leaders relate to turnaround efforts designed to support marginalized populations?

Literature Review

This literature review addresses three main themes: (1) traditionally marginalized student populations; (2) educational reform related to historically marginalized students; and (3) the role of central office administrators. Each major theme also includes sub-themes that have emerged in the literature.

Theme 1: Traditionally Marginalized Student Populations

Throughout the history of the United States, specific student populations have been marginalized and underserved within the public school system, and for decades there have been efforts to address discrimination and inequity on their behalf. Brown v. Board of Education (1954), a landmark case, began to dismantle the dual system of public education for students that segregated white students from black students. It was also a touchstone for the ideal of public education as a great equalizer, a concept Lyndon B. Johnson (1965) described while signing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) by stating: "As the son of a tenant farmer, I know that education is the only valid passport from poverty." This ideal is unraveling, however, as the percentage of high poverty, majority black, and Hispanic families rises (Government Accountability Office Report, 2016), and achievement and equity gaps persist.

In the United States today, we know that factors such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, gender, and sexual orientation influence student outcomes (Massey, 2007). Educational disparities emerge for traditionally marginalized students in early childhood and continue throughout elementary and secondary school (American Psychological Association, 2012). According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (U.S. Department of Education, 2013), by age seventeen, the average white student scores approximately three years ahead of the average black or Hispanic student.

When studying how central office administrators, work to support traditionally marginalized student populations, one must first understand the historical experiences of traditionally marginalized student populations in U.S. schools, as these experiences have resulted in the disparities that continue today. These disparities are explained and organized into the following subthemes: (a) access to equitable education; (b) achievement gaps; and (c) school discipline.

Access to equitable education. Skiba et al., (2008) define disproportionality "as the representation of a group in a category that exceeds our expectations for that group, or differs substantially from the representation of others in that category" (p.266). Disproportionality pervades U.S. public school systems. In Massachusetts, school districts serving low-income populations have fewer resources and academic support than wealthier counterparts, impacting low-income students and, because there is a significant correlation between socioeconomic status and race, students of color. It is here that we begin to examine achievement gaps as they relate to students living in poverty and children of color, and schools with a high percentage of low-income families (McGee, 2004). Predominantly low-income districts serve approximately 25% of all students in Massachusetts, including a large percentage of black and Latino students (Rodriguez, Jones, Tittmann, & Wagman, 2015). Traditionally, demographic shifts have impacted urban areas as immigrant families settle in urban centers. These shifts can be magnified by "white flight," a term coined to describe the large percentage of middle class white families who moved to the suburbs during the desegregation movement in urban schools in the 1960s and 1970s. Researchers describe a modern version of "white flight" as white families capitalize on the availability of charter schools and school choice (Renzulli & Evans, 2014). While immigrant families historically settled in urban areas, some are now establishing

roots in suburban and rural areas, causing more districts to see a shift in demographics and highlighting the importance of focusing on equity and achievement.

The opportunity for every student to attain academic success is considered a cornerstone of the U.S. educational system. With these opportunities proving to be less abundant in under-resourced schools, however, this cornerstone is fantasy rather than reality. Less affluent communities face more challenges raising revenue through local property taxes (Rodriguez, Jones, Tittmann, & Wagman, 2015). Although these communities receive more state aid, they have less overall funding to invest in schools than affluent communities, because property taxes are lower and therefore available funds are less; therefore, lower SES communities often have larger class sizes, fewer electives, and less common planning time for educators. Each of these factors limits students' opportunities and subsequent performance.

To meet students' needs and provide educational support, schools often create processes that lead to over-identifying traditionally marginalized students as students with disabilities. Minority students are disproportionately represented in special education (Skiba, et al., 2008). Consistent patterns have shown that black students, in particular males, are overrepresented in overall special education services and are often categorized as having emotional disabilities (Skiba et al., 2008). Black students are also overrepresented in more restrictive environments and underrepresented in less restrictive settings. The under-representation in less restrictive settings may have a stronger impact given the importance of including students in classes with engaging and challenging academic content (Wenglinsky, 2004).

Skiba and colleagues (2008) suggest that educators who mistake cultural differences for cognitive or behavioral disabilities account for the disproportionate representation of some

minority groups in disability categories. This also explains why students whose first language is not English are also often misclassified as needing special education services. Culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students are often referred to as English language learners (ELLs) in public education. By the year 2050, this population is anticipated to double (Meskill, 2005), making it even more important that educators discern between language differences and specific learning disabilities. When examining the role of white racial identity in preparing novice English language teachers (ELTs), Liggett (2010) identified structural obstacles of physical and social marginalization that limited the academic success of ELLs.

Achievement gaps. According to Ladson-Billings (2006), "the achievement gap is a matter of race and class; and a gap persists in academic achievement between minority and disadvantaged students and their white counterparts" (p. 3). Across the United States, achievement gaps persist for historically marginalized subgroups, despite policies aimed to close gaps and mandate improvement, and despite practitioners' increasing focus on improving underserved populations' outcomes. The importance of closing achievement gaps cannot be overstated. Failing to raise the achievement level of students across the entire population means that academic skill levels will continue to slide backward, resulting in a less competitive U.S. nation (Ferguson, 2014).

Raising achievement levels is a daunting task that requires basic components, such as time, appropriate processes (methods and goals), content (relevant and rigorous), supportive context (district administrators and policies) and persistence (Gleason, 2010). According to Wenglinsky (2004), school systems can help close achievement gaps by accomplishing the following: a) reducing the disproportionate number of minorities in special education; b) exposing minority students who are achieving near grade level to more advanced and

challenging content; c) providing teachers with professional development on addressing the needs of an ethnically diverse population; d) improving teacher education to increase the responsiveness of prospective teachers to minority students; and e) addressing the achievement gap as part of the accountability system.

While Massachusetts leads the nation on many measures of school performance, gaps among racial lines are prevalent. In 2015, 40% of all black third graders in Massachusetts were proficient or advanced in reading, as measured by the state accountability assessment. This represents an increase of 4% from 2007. Improvement for black students can also be observed in math with 36% of eighth grade students scoring at least proficient in 2015, a 17% increase since 2007. Yet, despite these improvements and the fact that black students are outperforming peers in other states, black students in Massachusetts scored 12% lower than white students on the eighth-grade math assessment. Similarly, Hispanic and Latino students scored 11% lower than white students, and low-income students performed 10% lower than their more affluent peers. Across Massachusetts, Rodriguez, Jones, Tittmann, and Wagman (2015) claim the proficiency rates in math and English are lower in schools in which at least 60% of students are low-income compared to schools whose percentage of low-income students is below that threshold.

School discipline. Students of color are more likely than white students to receive school punishments (Kupchik, 2007). For decades, national, state, and district level data show that students of color have been disproportionately suspended and expelled from school at a rate two to three times higher than white students (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). Being excluded from school negatively impacts student achievement, in part because access to education is withheld. Disproportionate disciplinary action and identification for special

education indicate a failure to meet the mandate of equitable opportunities and outcomes for all (Zion, et al., 2015).

Black and Latino students, particularly males, perceive school safety practices as unfair, poorly communicated, and unevenly applied when compared to their white counterparts. Devine (1996) argues school security measures are implemented more often in schools serving a majority population of students of color, who are more likely than white students to be subjected to school discipline such as expulsion or suspension (Eitle & Eitle, 2004; Ferguson, 2000; Kupchik, 2007; Skiba, Michael, Nardo & Peterson, 2000). Schools rely on three security-based strategies: surveillance, school resource officers (SRO), and punishments, including zero tolerance policies. These strategies offer a response when students are in danger, but may be applied and enforced in racially unequal ways (Kupchik, 2007). Additionally, since school decision makers are predisposed to view students of color as having worse demeanors and more negative attitudes than white students, school punishments are frequently unequal (Ferguson, 2000; Skiba et al., 2000).

The overuse of exclusionary discipline with students of color has led to what is known as the "school to prison pipeline." In a pattern of discipline that can be traced back to the K-12 school environment, people of color, particularly black males, are increasingly overrepresented in the United States prison system (Dancy, 2014). Wilson (2014) studied the school to prison pipeline and identified four ways to avoid it for students of color: eliminating zero tolerance policies, personal efficacy and systemic change, community support, and youth engagement. An awareness of the range of dangerous outcomes that can be traced back to the use of exclusionary discipline may benefit district and school administrators and help in the process of replacing

traditional exclusionary discipline with alternative, yet effective, disciplinary measures (Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014).

Summary of traditionally marginalized student populations. The historical experience of traditionally marginalized students in the United States is illustrated by persistent achievement and equity gaps. These gaps exist for students of color, students for whom English is not a first language, students with disabilities, and students living in poverty, and are manifested in academic achievement, special education referrals, inaccessibility to quality education, and overuse of school discipline. Because the organization of schooling has led to these issues, change at the district level is imperative to improve outcomes for historically marginalized students. In the following section, we discuss the role of education reform in closing these gaps.

Theme 2: Educational Reform Related to Historically Marginalized Students

To address educational disparities, the United States educational system has implemented many reform initiatives. When studying how central office administrators organize their work to support traditionally marginalized student populations, it is necessary to understand the shifts that have occurred in reform efforts and how the accountability movement began. Reform efforts are organized into the following subthemes: (a) national reform efforts; (b) reform efforts in Massachusetts; and (c) turnaround schools.

National reform efforts. From the beginning, local school districts oversaw schooling in the United States, with states playing an important but secondary role. States, not the federal government, have the constitutional responsibility for providing public education in the United States and all states except Hawaii delegate this responsibility to local school districts (McDermott, 2006). The creation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in

1965, established federal government involvement in schooling and created federal funding for education (Mehta, 2013). States were provided with supplemental federal dollars for high-poverty schools with "the hope of equalizing educational opportunity for poor and minority students" (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009, p. 17). Through the 1990s the federal government continued to play a role in education, yet its reach was insignificant and decisions were left to states and districts (Mehta, 2013), with few stipulations and little accountability for student achievement (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009).

A Nation at Risk (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), often cited as a critical document in education reform (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009; Mehta, 2013), marked the beginning of the movement toward standardization and accountability (Olsen & Sexton, 2009). This report, which identified the United States as caught in a "rising tide of mediocrity," called for a new focus on excellence for all (Mehta, 2013) and highlighted increasing concern about student achievement and its impact on economic development (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009). It made recommendations for improving education, which included a longer school day and year, additional required high school courses in "the New Basics," and increased testing for students as indicators of proficiency (Mehta, 2013). *A Nation at Risk* launched a national school reform movement, and over the last several decades, standards and test-based accountability has become central to education policy (Olsen & Sexton, 2009; Mehta, 2013). Today the federal government has more control over public education than at any other point in history (Mehta, 2013).

The standards-based movement that occurred at the state level in the 1990s paved the way for the federal move towards standards-based reform and ultimately led to NCLB. Standards-based reform set standards for what students should be expected to do,

established assessments to measure progress, and held schools accountable for progress toward goals. The Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 supported these measures, which became a federal requirement under NCLB (Mehta, 2013).

While expanding the role of the federal government, NCLB built upon the 1994 reforms to mandate that schools and districts dramatically improve performance. While deferring to states in the context of standards and measures of success, annual testing was required in grades 3 - 8 and sanctions were imposed on schools that did not improve. Adequate yearly progress (AYP) needed to be demonstrated on state tests of basic skills. The expectation was that the average student body score would improve year to year and scores of various subgroups within a school or district would also improve. These subgroups included black and Latino students in addition to students with disabilities and low-income students. The ultimate aim was to eliminate the achievement gap between white middle class students and ethnic minority students (Valenzuela, Prieto, & Hamilton, 2007). Although it is generally understood that the accountability movement, and specifically NCLB, have substantially impacted schools (Au, 2007; Booher-Jennings, 2006; Lowenhaupt, Spillane, & Hallet, 2016), conflicting narratives endure about the nature and degree of this impact. Some say NCLB ensured a focus on equity (Braun, 2004; Williamson, Bondy, Langley, & Mayne, 2005), while others say it led to greater inequities (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Au, 2007).

Massachusetts reform efforts. Since the 1980s, a number of reforms has occurred at the state level regarding charter schools, public school choice, and vouchers, as well as standards-based reforms (Mehta, 2013). Intended to improve outcomes for historically marginalized students by improving instruction and increasing access to high-quality instruction, these reforms have challenged public schools. The standards-based reform movement of the 1990s started as a

state-level reform and became the template for federal policy, and similar to the nation-wide movement, reform in Massachusetts started with concern about the performance of public schools that grew throughout the 1980s (McDermott, 2006).

Massachusetts was one of the first states to enact standards-based reforms. The Massachusetts Education Reform Act (MERA) of 1993 addressed education reform while embroiled in a state financial crisis that resulted in students in poor communities launching a lawsuit against the state. MERA doubled state aid to local districts and required state authorities to hold districts, schools, and even students themselves accountable for performance on standardized tests (McDermott, 2006). MERA directed the Board of Education to "establish a set of statewide educational goals" formulated to set high expectations for student performance (Massachusetts General Laws, Ch. 69, sec. 1D). The law further required a criterion-referenced assessment and gave the Board of Education power to identify underperforming schools and districts based on student assessment results. Sanctions included replacing the principal of underperforming schools, giving all teachers pink slips, and placing underperforming districts under state receivership.

Mirroring national debate, there are conflicting narratives about the impact of state reforms in Massachusetts. While advocates of standards-based reform highlight MERA as a national model and point to the rigorous standards in Massachusetts and high, standardized test scores, others emphasize that MERA has not resulted in academic proficiency for *all* students (McDermott, 2006).

Turnaround schools. School turnaround has become central to both policy and practice since the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top (RTTT), which designates low performing schools as "in need of improvement." Once labeled, schools face a

series of sanctions including "school improvement," "corrective action," and finally, "restructuring" (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Massachusetts publishes an annual Accountability Report that classifies all districts into one of five accountability and assistance levels. Generally, districts are classified into the level of its lowest performing school. The highest performing districts are designated Level 1 and the lowest performing are designated Level 5 (Accountability, Partnerships and Targeted Assistance, 2017). In Massachusetts, Level 5 is the most serious category and these districts must enter into receivership. Once a district enters receivership, the Commissioner names a new district leader called the receiver. The receiver has the powers of the superintendent and school committee and reports directly to the Commissioner. The receiver will be held accountable for improving education across the district. Additionally, the DESE commits resources for developing research-based tools designed to support continuous school improvement. The district then develops a three-year turnaround plan with recommendations from a Local Stakeholders Group (e.g. teachers, parents, workforce, early education, or higher education) and the Commissioner of Education.

Similar to the research on federal and state reform efforts, early reports on the success of turnaround efforts are mixed (Finnigan, Daly & Stewart, 2012; Mette & Scribner, 2014) and no single strategy has proven to be effective (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005). In order for accountability systems to work, they need to appeal to high-performing teachers and administrators. Intensifying pressure and sanctions, central to turnaround efforts, creates defensiveness and deprofessionalizes teachers, administrators, and staff (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2006; Friedman, Galligan, Albano, & O'Connor, 2009). Tremendous pressure and short timelines to reach goals correlate with limited school improvement. These features limit and

even restrict exploration and learning, which result in action plans that are unlikely to have a large impact (Finnigan, Daly & Stewart, 2012).

Mette and Scribner (2014) describe a turnaround case study in which the school principal used data to effectively identify problems and cull out ineffective teachers, but was ultimately unable to motivate existing teachers. Despite gains in student assessment scores, the intensive focus on assessment burdened teachers, overwhelmed students, and left the principal feeling that the turnaround process damaged the school's culture.

Since relationships and social ties may facilitate or constrain improvement efforts, district leadership for student achievement under receivership warrants more attention to both internal and external leadership relationship networks as they undergo intensive reform efforts (Collins & Clark, 2003; Honig 2006; Honig & Coburn, 2008; Copland & Knapp, 2006) and develop sustainable transformation (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). These networks play a critical role in identifying strategies and practices that will enable district leaders to better support marginalized student populations and strive toward eliminating achievement gaps (Massachusetts' System for Differentiated Recognition, Accountability, & Support, 2015).

Summary of educational reform related to historically marginalized students. For much of this history of the United States, local school districts controlled public education. However, shifts since the 1960s led to increased state and federal oversight in education, including a focus on accountability and standards. Today, the federal government has greater control than at any other point in history, and standards- and assessment-based accountability have become central to education policy. In Massachusetts and across the country, schools and districts that continually fail to meet improvement targets are labeled turnaround schools and districts. While turnaround schools incorporate measures intended to

narrow persistent achievement gaps more quickly, early reports on the success of turnaround schools and districts are mixed.

Theme 3: The Role of Central Office Administrators

While the constitution grants states control over school policy, school districts have almost total control over policy implementation (Saiger, 2005). Thus, it is necessary to analyze the roles central office administrators play in improving traditionally marginalized student achievement. The empirical literature surrounding this topic is organized into the following sub-themes: (a) the history of superintendents and central office administrators; and (b) the role of central office administrators in school improvement.

History of superintendents and central office administrators. The position of superintendent of schools was first introduced at the state level in 1812 in New York (Butts & Cremin, 1953). Local superintendents became more common shortly before the turn of the century, with most major cities employing a superintendent of schools by 1890 (Knezevich, 1984). The superintendent of schools, and more broadly school district central offices, were originally established "not to address teaching and learning, but mainly to bring administrative order to schooling" (Honig, 2013, p. 2). School district central offices were tasked with carrying out a range of regulatory and business functions, including managing student enrollment and tax revenue. For much of the 20th century, school district central offices continued to pay little attention to improving teaching and learning and remained focused on a set of business, regulatory, and fiscal functions (Honig, 2013).

Honig (2013) summarizes the evolution of the roles and responsibilities of central office administrators from their establishment to current day practices. She identifies three core elements that characterize the current expectation of central office administrators to make student

learning their top priority: intensive partnerships between central offices and principals; relevant, high-quality, and differentiated central office services; and leadership in teaching and learning. This represents a significant change and a new set of work practices and responsibilities for central office administrators.

Johnson (1996) writes specifically about the change in the role of superintendent, who is now expected to accurately identify problems in a school district and develop and execute effective improvement plans to solve these problems. Simultaneously, the superintendent has lost power in local curriculum policy, as state and federal governments have focused more on the issue of achievement (McNeil, 1996). This has led to the current perception that the role of the superintendent and other central office administrators is to facilitate educational reform by turning policy into actions that improve school practices and support principal leadership (Bottoms & Fry, 2009).

Bjork, Browne-Ferringo, and Kowalski (2014) also note the changing role of the superintendent since the mid-1990s and highlight the recent focus on carrying out district-level educational reform. Federal and state policies, such as The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), place demands on central offices to help schools improve and reduce achievement gaps. In an effort to motivate states and districts to generate innovative ideas and reforms that would accelerate improvement and close persistent achievement gaps, the Federal government created Race to the Top (RTTT), a competitive grant, in 2009. RTTT was a part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 and funded by the ED Recovery Act. The competitive grants offered incentives to districts based on points earned for successfully meeting certain educational policies such as adopting common standards through the Common Core and implementing an educator evaluation system that rated teachers and principals using multiple

measures of educator effectiveness. However, such policies do not fully account for the mismatch between traditional central office work and new performance demands (Honig, 2013). To carry out these new performance demands effectively, the superintendent must assume five roles: teacher-scholar to lead instructional change; manager to handle finances, accountability, and policy implementation; political-democratic leader to balance the demands and needs of all stakeholders; applied social scientist to use research and tacit knowledge to inform decisions; and communicator to work collaboratively in an information-based society (Bjork et al., 2014).

The shift in the role of superintendent, and more broadly all central office administrators, from managers to instructional leaders, has impacted district leaders' responsibilities. Concurrently, the organization and size of central offices has changed to reflect the focus on instructional leadership. As central office administrators have evolved to meet the increasing challenges they face, these district leaders are better positioned to approach instructional leadership using a distributive leadership style and approach. The distributed nature of this work becomes an important aspect of educational reform and school improvement. The next section explains the influence that education reform and the focus on school improvement have had on the roles and responsibilities of central office administrators.

The role of central office administrators in school improvement. Research suggests that without effective central office leadership, reform efforts will likely fail at both school and district levels (Honig, 2013; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Since the superintendent and other central office administrators are responsible for creating and implementing the district's goals and vision, there is a strong correlation between effective central office leadership and school improvement. As previously mentioned, the changing role of a central office administrator and the organizational structure of the central office staff, encourage and position district leaders to

take a distributed approach to their work. As a result, interactions between central office administrators increase. In fact, researchers have identified these interactions as a key aspect of the educational improvement process. Specifically, the superintendent's interactions and practices can support a district-wide approach to school improvement (Horton & Martin, 2012).

Among central office administrators, strong relationships and increased collaboration may increase output and foster school improvement. Bird, Dunaway, Hancock, and Wang (2013) identified a significant connection between a superintendent's authenticity and the application of high quality school improvement practices across the district. This authenticity is critical to create strong relationships among educational leaders in the district. Johnson and Chrispeels (2010) add that relational and ideological linkages are "essential for enhancing commitment and professional accountability and for ensuring a coherent instructional focus and organizational learning" (p. 738). This contrasts with a more traditional approach, in which districts focus on structural linkages to enforce reform efforts, by promoting a team approach that relies on relationships and interactions.

When implementing policy and educational reforms designed to support traditionally marginalized populations, a collective approach among central office administrators is beneficial (Datnow & Park, 2009). As central office administrators interpret and implement policy, they must mediate external policy demands with internal goals and priorities (Honig, 2004; Datnow, Hubbard, & Mehan, 1998). Honig and Hatch (2004) describe this mediation through a process known as policy coherence. During this process of policy implementation, schools and school districts set internal goals and decide whether to bridge (attach) or buffer (isolate) themselves from external policy demands. In this process, it is imperative that central office administrators work with each other and with building level administrators to ensure quality policy

implementation. Policy coherence is a dynamic process that involves more than simply interpreting and implementing policy; it recognizes the balancing act that administrators must perform when interpreting educational reform, some of which is meant to support traditionally marginalized students. Mediating educational policy demands is especially important in an era in which federal and state policies heavily influence district practices. Andero (2000) investigated the ways in which the superintendent's role has changed to influence curriculum policy at the local level, finding that curricular policy decisions are most productive when all constituents, including the principal, superintendent, and local school board, are actively involved. A collective approach to policy implementation has implications for policies related to all areas of school improvement focused on supporting traditionally marginalized populations.

Furthermore, there is an increasing policy demand for central office administrators to use evidence in their decision-making processes, and how districts are organized influences how they gather, interpret, and incorporate data into this process (Honig and Coburn, 2008). The number of employees, the scope of an employee's job, poor connections with other departments, and time constraints can significantly limit a central office administrator's ability to effectively use evidence, but high levels of social capital, which allow for effective communication and social ties, can mitigate this. Honig and Venkateswaran (2012) suggest that "both central office and school staff members participate in the flow of information into evidence-use processes at either level," (p. 206) and that both parties are essential partners in the sense-making process. This information flow supports evidence use when it is selective and occurs in the context of close social ties, but central office administrators may limit evidence use in schools when they set and communicate formal expectations. As a result, it is more important to create a culture that values using evidence when making collaborative decisions than to outright demand evidence use.

As central office administrators evolve into instructional leaders, they are expected to interact with and build the instructional leadership capacity of school-based administrators (Honig, 2012). Educational research has demonstrated that principals' instructional leadership is an important contributing factor to improving teaching and is linked to gains in student achievement (Hallinger, 2005; Honig, 2012; Leithwood, 2004; Murphy & Hallinger, 1988). As a result, a primary role of a central office leader, especially when supporting marginalized populations, is to support principals' instructional leadership (Honig & Rainey, 2014; Wells, Maxfield, Kiocko, & Feun, 2010). Honig (2012) identifies five ways that central office administrators support the development of principals to become effective instructional leaders at the school level: focusing on joint work; modeling; developing and using tools (e.g. protocol, checklist); brokering; and creating and sustaining social engagement. This reflects a direct need for a design-based research approach by both central office and building level administrators to significantly increase leadership practice in support of improved student achievement for all students, including those from traditionally marginalized populations (Honig, 2013).

Further reflecting on the changing role of the central office administrator is an emerging body of research that suggests that superintendents and other central office administrators collectively improve educational outcomes for traditionally marginalized students by improving the cultural proficiency of educators across the district. Cultural proficiency is defined as the honoring of differences among cultures, viewing diversity as a benefit, and interacting knowledgeably and respectfully with a variety of cultural groups (Lindsey et al., 2005). Wright and Harris (2010) determined that the superintendent could impact the achievement gap by modeling cultural proficiency, responding to data, hiring a diverse staff, and developing written policies that focus on cultural proficiency. These practices were magnified when

superintendents acted as change agents, strongly valued cultural proficiency, demonstrated collaborative relationships, and built a culture of success. In an increasingly diverse educational environment, demographic changes require central office administrators to focus on cultural proficiency. However, many districts struggle to do this effectively, collectively failing to recognize simultaneously occurring racial inequalities, further impeding success for already marginalized low income and immigrant populations (Turner, 2015).

Summary of the role of central office administrators. Taken together, this research suggests that when working for educational improvement, a distributed and collaborative approach among central office administrators is not only beneficial, but also necessary. This has implications for central office administrators working to support traditionally marginalized students. Increasing diversity in American schools has led to persistent achievement and equity gaps, mostly affecting traditionally marginalized student populations. For decades, educators have focused on narrowing these long-standing achievement and equity gaps, driving much of the current state and federal policy. This has required the central office to shift their focus from operational and fiscal functions to a district-wide focus on instructional leadership meant to benefit all students (Honig, 2013). Accordingly, central office administrators must focus on building relationships and fostering interactions across the district.

With a collective approach to organizing the work of educational improvement, central office administrators are better positioned to perform duties that include making decisions based on evidence, building the capacity of others, improving cultural proficiency, and implementing educational policy and reform aimed at improving student learning. This synthesis of existing literature indicates the importance of central office organization, but only touches on how this organization serves traditionally marginalized populations. This study will examine how one

district's central office administrative team organizes their work for the specific purpose of supporting traditionally marginalized populations.

Conclusion

Across the United States, achievement and equity gaps exist for historically marginalized students, limiting educational opportunities for students of color, students with disabilities, students for whom English is a second language, and students living in poverty. Despite reform efforts to narrow these achievement and equity differences, gaps have persisted. As U.S. schools become increasingly diverse, these gaps affect greater numbers of students. Simultaneously, the work of central office administrators has changed, resulting in a need for central office administrators to make student learning their primary focus. By implementing goals and reforms focused on improving student learning for marginalized populations, central office administrators may be able to play a role in narrowing achievement and equity gaps.

By investigating the ways that central office administrators work to support traditionally marginalized student populations this study adds to the scholarly research described in this chapter. Each co-author's individual inquiry provides a different lens through which to view this dilemma by focusing on the different interactions that occur at the central office level in an effort to narrow long-standing achievement and equity gaps.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODS

Introduction

This descriptive, qualitative study explored the interactions of central office administrators working in support of historically marginalized populations. Specifically, we utilized a case study methodology to conduct an in-depth inquiry of a bounded system (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Creswell, 2012). In this study, the bounded system, or case, (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2014), was a school district in Massachusetts designated as a Level 5 district, and therefore in turnaround status. A case study methodology supported our research by allowing us to investigate the practices of central office administrators while also allowing our research team to develop an understanding of important contextual conditions in this district (Yin, 2014). Specifically, we investigated how central office administrators organize their work in effort to make structural and cultural modifications that may improve the program of instruction in order to better serve all students in the district. It is important to understand who the students served in the district are, what the current reality is, and how these factors, in addition to others, impact the work of central office administrators. While other types of qualitative research would have also provided us with data needed to describe the interactions of central office administrators, they would not have anchored these interactions in the context of the district. Our aim was to capture the circumstances and conditions (Yin, 2014) of central office administrator practice in a turnaround district so that we could yield insight into how districts improve outcomes for historically marginalized students. This study was built on existing research and answers the following research question: *How do central office*

administrators organize their work in support of traditionally marginalized student populations?

Context

In 2010, Massachusetts embarked on an ambitious effort to turn around its lowest performing schools. An *Act Relative to the Achievement Gap* (2010) provided districts with the authority to change conditions that hindered previous improvement efforts and to take strategic actions designed to close achievement and opportunity gaps.

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) classifies schools into Levels 1 through 5, based on absolute achievement, student growth, and improvement trends, as measured by standardized state assessments. Level 1 represents schools in need of the least support, those that have met their gap-closing goals, while Level 5 represents the lowest performing schools, those in need of the most support. Schools and districts designated as Level 5 are placed under state receivership. While DESE's District and School Assistance Centers and Office of District and School Turnaround provide ongoing targeted support to Level 3, 4, and 5 districts and schools (Lane, Unger, & Stein, 2016), designation as a Level 5 districts means substantial resources are allocated to the district for developing and implementing research-based tools specifically designed to support continuous school improvement. In addition, a three-year turnaround plan is developed with recommendations from a local stakeholders group (teachers, parents, the community, healthcare, workforce, early education, and higher education, as outlined in legislation) and the state's commissioner.

Our case study was conducted within a Level 5, turnaround district that was implementing a turnaround plan. In accordance with state requirements (Massachusetts Department Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016), the partnering district's original turnaround plan (2015) included five priority areas: (1) provide high-quality instruction and

student-specific supports for all students, including students with disabilities and English language learners; (2) establish focused practices for improving instruction; (3) create a climate and culture that support students and engages families; (4) develop leadership, shared responsibility, and professional collaboration; and (5) organize the district for successful turnaround. In 2016, the Receiver/Superintendent wrote a memo to the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education requesting permission to modify three parts of the turnaround plan: (1) simplification of the priority area titles; (2) change Building Based Support Teams (BBSTs) to Student Support Teams (SSTs); and (3) change the titles for select staff members. Table 2 outlines the original and refined titles. The refined titles were created to both simplify the language and make them more memorable while also using select language to reinforce the district's values.

Table 2

Simplifying the Priority Area Titles

Priority Area#	PriorityArea(asof10/1/16)	RequestedPriority AreaNameChange
1	Provide high-quality instruction and student-specific supports for all students, including students with disabilities and English language learners.	High Quality Instruction for All
2	Establish focused practices for improving instruction.	Personalized Pathways
3	Create a climate and culture that support students and engage families.	Engaged Students, Family and Community
4	Develop leadership, shared responsibility, and professional collaboration.	An Effective and Thriving Workforce
5	Organize the district for successful turnaround.	A System of Empowered Schools

Conducting our research in a turnaround district allowed us to explore and understand how central office administrators utilize social network ties to implement policy, collaborate with internal and external partners, and communicate the needs of students in an effort to better support marginalized populations. Furthermore, district level leadership is critical in initiating and sustaining change that leads to measurable improvement (Leithwood, 2013).

Data Collection

Data collection for this qualitative case study took place from October 2017 to November 2017. Our study was designed to be emergent and flexible, a characteristic of qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data sources included interviews, observations, and document review. Data collection began after district and IRB approval were obtained. The initial stages of research involved review of the district's Level 5 turnaround plan, the District Review Report conducted by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), and the district's culture and climate survey data. Prior to collecting data in the field, the researchers connected with the central office leaders scheduled to be interviewed, ensuring open communication, confidentiality, and integrity (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). Individual interviews of central office administrators were conducted in person at designated district locations. To systematically develop and refine the interview protocol (Appendix A), researchers piloted the interview protocol using a multi-step interview protocol refinement framework (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Interviews served as the primary data source, follow up questions and document requests were communicated via email and through the district's project manager, this process allowed the research team to respond to changing conditions in the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Interviews

Typical of qualitative studies, targeted interviews directly focused on our case study research questions (Yin, 2009) were our primary source of data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To better understand how central office administrators interact, communicate, and implement policy when striving to improve outcomes for historically marginalized populations, we interviewed all formal central office administrators or executive cabinet members as referred by the district. Given the relatively small size of the district, we interviewed all nine central office administrators designated as the central office leadership according to the district website and confirmed by the district's project manager.

Included among the nine central office administrators was the receiver/superintendent, who was appointed by the commissioner of education in July 2015 when the district was designated as Level 5 and entered into turnaround status. Since that time the district has undergone significant restructuring and all nine central office administrators had been appointed to their roles since receivership. While one of the central office administrators had worked in the district in various roles for twenty years, all others were also new to the district, and had worked in the district for two years or less at the time of data collection. Also worth noting is two of the central office administrators had worked with the receiver/superintendent in previous settings prior to joining the district.

The interview protocol (Appendix A) was vetted and tested through a four phase interview protocol refinement process: 1) ensure interview questions are aligned with the overall and individual research questions of the overall dissertation in practice (DIP) (Appendix D); 2) DIP role play and protocol practice; 3) pilot interview protocol with central office administrators; and 4) reflection (Appendix E), analysis of feedback, and refinement of protocol. This multi-step

protocol refinement process (Castillo-Montoya, 2016) supported the researchers' efforts to have a well-vetted, refined interview protocol; however, as Merriam (2009) states, researchers can "unhook themselves from the constant reference to the questions and can go with the natural flow of the interview" (p. 103).

Question alignment. Interview data served as the primary data source for both the collaborative Dissertation in Practice (DIP) and each individual study. The interview protocol was designed to collect the data needed to answer the DIP research question and the research questions for each individual study; therefore, phase 1 was critical to ensure that all necessary data were collected while also creating a conversational flow (Merriam, 2009). The interview protocol matrix (Appendix D) maps the interview questions against the research questions (Castillo-Montoya, 2016) and was used to verify adequate data collection.

Role play and protocol practice. The research team engaged in a role playing process designed to test out the effectiveness of the interview protocol and allow for clarity and calibration of how each question should be asked to ensure the most efficient and effective data collection process. The training cycle was as follows: one team member used the interview protocol to ask the questions, another team member answered, a third team member listened, and the fourth team member observed. This cycle was repeated so that all four research team members practiced asking the questions. Feedback was collected and a reflection tool (Appendix E) was utilized to collect ideas for refinement. Once the interview protocol was refined it was then tested again.

Interview protocol pilot. Two research team member piloted the interview protocol independently with at least one, central office administrator from a district of their choice (Merriam, 2009). This process allowed researchers to try out the interview protocol in the field

and test out the balance between inquiry and conversation (Weiss, 1995; Merriam, 2009; Rossman & Rallis, 1998). A feedback tool (Appendix E) was utilized after the pilot interview to assess how the participant perceived the questions.

Receiving feedback and reflecting on interview protocol. The data collected from the researcher and field test participants was utilized to improve the interview protocol prior to entering the field in the selected turnaround school district. This process was critical for ensuring that each researcher was able to collect interview data that addressed specific research question(s) for both the collaborative DIP and each individual slice (Appendix D).

Conducting the interviews. Prior to conducting interviews, the researchers reviewed public documents to gain an understanding of the goals in the district and how the district defined marginalized students. At the beginning of each interview, participants were informed of our interest in how central office administrators interact and carry out their work in support of historically marginalized populations in the district (Weiss, 1995; Rossman & Rallis, 1998). Participants were also informed that they would remain anonymous, and that their insights may lead to recommendations for the district and the field at large. Most one-on-one interviews were approximately 50 to 60 minutes, one interview lasted 20 minutes, and one interview was taken in two parts due to a technological glitch. All interviews were recorded and transcribed by the interviewer. The interviewer also took notes during the interview on nonverbal behaviors (Creswell, 2012).

Interviews followed a semi-structured protocol (Merriam, 2009), which is provided in Appendix A. Our protocol specifically addressed questions about how policy is implemented in the district, what language administrators use to talk about marginalized populations, how administrators work together and collaborate, and the extent to which the district's leadership

network facilitates advice seeking related to turnaround goals and efforts. The questions were written to facilitate a conversation, a method that works well when participants are not hesitant to articulate and comfortable sharing ideas (Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Creswell, 2012). We began with background questions to establish a relationship and rapport (Weiss, 1995) with the interviewee (e.g. Please tell me a little about your work and your experiences in the district?). We then asked questions about relational ties and collaborative practices (e.g. Who are the people you turn to for advice related to the district's goals and efforts?) and the work the district is engaged in (e.g. Please describe some of the things you have done to build the capacity of the schools in order to better support marginalized populations?). To close the interview, we asked if there was anything else the interviewee would like to share; this allowed us to gain any additional information related to the topic that the interviewee felt was important and relevant. This also continued the theme of a conversation (Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Creswell, 2012). To ensure good data, interview questions were open-ended. If more detail was needed, follow-up questions and probes were prepared for each question (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Observations

Researchers conducted one observation of a district leadership team meeting. This observation took place after individual interviews so researchers could study actual behavior of central office administrators (Creswell, 2012). The observation lasted approximately two hours, with one researcher present. The meeting selected by the district for the observation was of the teaching and learning team and pertained to the district turnaround plan, showing group interactions related to supporting marginalized populations. Observing the meeting was intended to provide a first-hand sense of how central office administrators approach their work, and the

language used when communicating about historically marginalized populations. An observation protocol was used to record information collected during observations (Appendix B).

During the observation, the researcher recorded initial notes and later expanded them into more descriptive field notes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2001). Notes included the date, and contain a running log of the time every three to five minutes to monitor pace. Efforts were made to record participants' quotes or paraphrase statements. The researcher also recorded other details such as actions, mannerisms, and reactions. Completed field notes included a description of the environment, details of what individuals did or said, stories that were shared, and estimates for the amount of time participants actively participated.

Document Review

To enrich the data collected in interviews, we also reviewed public and private records in a document review (Creswell, 2012). While the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) website and district website were used to find public records, central office administrators in the district were asked to provide private records. The documents reviewed included student data; this was essential to gain an understanding of the historically marginalized populations served in the district. Other documents included were the Level 5 turnaround plan for the district, district strategic goals, school improvement plans, meeting minutes, letters sent by central office administrators, and memos that related to the areas of this study. These documents existed independent of the research process, and therefore were unaffected by it (Yin, 2009); documents were thus grounded in the real world (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), and were a good data source for triangulation of interview data.

Data Analysis

Managing the Data

Data collection and analysis were done in a simultaneous process. Analysis begin as soon as data was collected. Each researcher kept an independent research journal throughout the data collection process to record details about events, decisions, questions, and wonderings. This supported the reliability of research findings, as it provided a record of how insights were developed (Yin, 2009). Each interview and observation were followed by a research journal entry. This entry was made within 24 hours of the event. Separate entries were written after each analysis in order to capture the investigators' reflections, tentative themes, hunches, ideas, and additional topics based on what was derived from the data set. We noted questions and emerging findings throughout the data collection process. After all of the interviews were conducted, data sets were compared with the second (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009) in a recursive and dynamic data collection process. Analysis became more intensive as the study progressed and once all data were collected (Merriam, 2009). Each researcher, independently, listened to and coded all nine interviews.

Coding

Text segment coding and labeling was utilized to organize various aspects of our data in order to form descriptions and broad themes (Creswell, 2012). Two or three words were used to create the text segment codes and came directly from participants' responses and routinely repeated ideas. The coding process allowed investigators to make sense of the data, examine for overlap and redundancy, and collapse the data into broad themes by determining what data to use and what to disregard. Coding of the interviews comprised a mix of a priori and emergent codes. Table 3 outlines initial categorical codes named as follows: background information;

overarching/general district information; collaboration; policy implementation; communication; and social networks.

Table 3

Initial Categorical Codes

Background Questions	BQ	Policy Implementation	PI
Overarching Questions	OAQ	Communication	C
Collaboration	COL	Social Networks	SN

A four-step process was adapted from McKether, Gluesing, and Riopelle's (2009) five-step process. This process was used to convert narrative interview data into text segments. To convert and analyze the interview data, the following steps were followed: 1) record and transcribe interviews using Rev, and store interviews; 2) clean and prepare data for importing into Google Drive; 3) import and code the interview transcriptions in Google Drive; and 4) create a Google Sheets data extract.

Interview Data Analysis

Interview data was used to explore patterns of interaction and perceptions of administrators in different district level leadership positions. All nine interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim using Rev, a mobile application and transcription service. The transcription data was cleaned for accuracy, shared with the research team, and independently coded by each researcher. First analysis began with the thematic areas from our initial categorical codes outlined in Table 4. An inductive analysis was used to allow for other themes to emerge "out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis" (Patton, 1990, p. 390). Interview data was analyzed using a constant comparative analysis method (Creswell, 2012), as well as checking and rechecking emerging themes (Patton,

1990). To ensure trustworthiness of interpretations, member-checking procedures were utilized when needed and as emerging themes were developed (Creswell, 2012; Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Observation Analysis

Observation data analysis occurred in several phases. The first phase include a preliminary exploratory analysis, which was conducted by the researcher who conducted the observation to obtain a general sense of the data and to generate memo ideas. The researcher then organized the data (Creswell, 2012) and created field notes. The field notes were then coded using codes developed during interview data analysis by individual researchers.

Document Analysis

Collected documents were utilized to triangulate data collected in interviews and observations (Creswell, 2012). This process of corroborating evidence supported the broad themes determined and enhanced the accuracy of the study. The team utilized text segment coding and labeling to form descriptions and these broad themes (Creswell, 2012). For more information on how each author has coded during the document analysis process, please see the individual methodology in chapter three.

Representing Findings

Three key findings from our data analysis are summarized in a narrative discussion along with recommendations for practitioners, limitations, and recommendations for future research. The findings emerged as common themes as a result of a synthesis of the findings in each individual study. The research team then determined possible recommendations for practitioners, limitations, and areas for future research along with a culminating conclusion.

Study Limitations

Qualitative case study is a reliable research design, as it can describe realistic interventions in a realistic context (Yin, 2009). However, there are five noteworthy limitations that accompany our study of how central office administrators organize their work in support of marginalized populations. First, this study primarily relied on qualitative interviews with central office administrators in a mid-size turnaround district in Massachusetts, making the researcher the primary vehicle for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009). As a result, each of these data points were self-reported, and therefore results may have been impacted or influenced by the individual researcher's frame of reference and positionality. While our research team, consisting of central office and building level administrators, used collaborative coding to recognize and document potential biases among our research team, it is more difficult to control biases that are present among the research participants. While observation data and document review served as secondary data collection points for triangulating our results, the possibility of bias cannot be overlooked.

Second, since case study research focuses on a single unit of analysis, the scope of our research study was to examine the practices that one district uses to support traditionally marginalized students. The study did not aim to report on multiple districts, common practices, or to evaluate the district or its administrators in their turnaround efforts. Furthermore, the study did not examine the practices of principals or teachers in support of marginalized students, as there is an already existing body of research on that topic. The aim was to collect and report, based on qualitative analysis, practices and interactions among central office administrators in support of marginalized students. A larger study with more resources may be able to study

multiple districts or units of study to report on larger scale best central office administrator practices in support of marginalized students.

A third limitation of this study was time. While we collected as much data as possible, the time frame of this study was limited to less than one year. Similarly, since we partnered with a recently identified turnaround district, many of the central office administrators were new to the district. This impacted the number of interactions that occur between central office administrators, and some policies and practices in support of marginalized students were relatively newly implemented. In turn, many of the leadership actions designed to support marginalized students were in their infancy while others were still in the planning stages. Multiple years of data would be needed to show changes in student performance and support.

A fourth limitation of this study is that, while we examined the organization and interactions between central office administrators in support of marginalized students, this study did not measure changes in student achievement. In other words, this study does not measure causality. However, we have utilized four research-based lenses through which to analyze leadership practices at the central office level, with an overarching focus on interactions, which may serve as a launching point for future researchers to use in determining some measure of causality.

Lastly, since our study primarily relied on semi-structured interviews as a data source, supporting data sources cannot be relied on to provide concrete determinations. For example, observation data from one district leadership team meeting provided a glimpse into how central office administrators work in support of marginalized populations, however, it would be inappropriate to rely on these data to make concrete statements or generalizations about work habits, since the number of observations were limited to one.

CHAPTER THREE

COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE USE IN A TURNAROUND DISTRICT

Introduction

The gap in academic achievement that persists between minority and disadvantaged students and their white peers is one of the most discussed issues in U S. education (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Closing the gap has become a top priority of school districts, especially since the implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2002. NCLB aims to close the achievement gap by improving the academic performance of disadvantage students (Bush, 2001). Disadvantaged or historically marginalized students meet one or more of the following criteria: economically poor, immigrants, a traditional minority, English language learners, and/or students with special needs (Gleason, 2010). Current research has shown (Henze & Arriaza, 2006) that disaggregated data by race, socioeconomic status, and gender still point to outcomes that are too predictable for these populations and that achievement gaps continue to persist. Females continue to drop out of mathematics and science, and African Americans, Latinx, and low-income Whites and Asians are clustered in the lower quartiles of standardized assessments (Henze & Arriaza, 2006). Additionally, data on college bound students, dropouts, disciplinary actions, and graduation rates reflect the same predictable lower outcomes for traditionally marginalized students.

In order to understand this educational issue our team research study is focused on how central office administrators organize and work in support of historically marginalized populations. Specifically our study was conducted in a Level 5 turnaround school district. As stated in the methods section, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) classifies schools into Levels 1 through 5, based on absolute achievement,

student growth, and improvement trends as measured on standardized state assessments. Level 5 represents the lowest performing schools, in need of the most support (and in fact, have been placed under state receivership). DESE commits substantial resources to a Level 5 district specifically designed to support continuous school improvement. This includes a three –year turnaround plan to accelerate student achievement (Lane, Unger & Stein, 2016).

This study is of value to both researchers and practitioners as both groups are interested in exploring ways to close persistent achievement gaps. Theoharis (2007) claims, "social justice leadership can help to guide and transform culture, curriculum, pedagogical practices, atmosphere, and school wide priorities to benefit marginalized students" (p.221).

By focusing on leadership actions related to communication, collaboration, policy implementation, and social network ties, our study provides information about the current practices of administrators in one turnaround district serving a diverse population.

Central office organization, which includes communication, collaboration, policy implementation and social network ties for practitioners, is critical in linking the district vision to successful outcomes for historically marginalized students. Mac Iver and Farley (2003) report that high performing or improving districts possess some of the following characteristics: (1) an urgency regarding improved achievement for all students; (2) a sense that achievement is the primary responsibility of every staff member in the district; and (3) a shared sense of the central office as a support and service organization for schools. Language plays an important role in each characteristic, as how central office administrators talk, and discuss ways to support students strongly impact communication, collaboration, relationships with stakeholders, and strength of ties. Appropriate language or discourse is an essential component of how districts improve outcomes for students.

Drawing on this idea my individual study focuses on the language used by central office administrators to support marginalized populations. This is an underexplored but an important area of effective central office leadership. Language matters; it inherently shapes perceptions, defines reality, and affects mutual understanding (Pallon, 2000). Howard (2007) claims "One of the most important functions as a school leader is to transform political jargon like No Child Left Behind into a moral imperative that inspires teachers to work toward justice, not mere compliance" (p. 4). In other words, how district administrators use language to motivate and inspire teachers and stakeholders to close the achievement gap for marginalized populations goes to the heart of what is being said and what is being heard and influences what is being done.

A full analysis of communication in central office leadership is necessary to examine how the language that grounds actions impact effectiveness within the central office and with stakeholders, including central office administrators, building principals, teachers, community and students.

Conceptual Framework

For this qualitative study, I used Theoharis' (2007) definition of social justice leadership as the conceptual framework. Social justice leadership considers race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States central to advocacy, leadership practice and vision. At the center of this practice and vision: are equity and access. One aspect of social justice leadership is language awareness. Bolitho et al., (2003) define "language awareness as a mental attribute, which develops through paying motivated attention to language use, and then gaining insights into how it works" (p.251). Henze and Arriaza (2016) describe the importance of studying "discourse" in relation to educational leaders, as "Discourse not only mirrors their practice, it is their practice. They

accomplish much of their work through discourse, both spoken and written" (p. 164). I use these definitions to help guide and attend to language use, as this is particularly important for marginalized populations. As Bolitho et al., (2003) observes, "It [language] is a pedagogic approach that aims to help learners gain insight" (p. 251).

For the purpose of my study, I used the framework of social justice leadership and language awareness to direct attention to how central office administrators use language in support of marginalized populations. Specifically, I looked at how language connects or disconnects understanding and action in support of marginalized populations. An example of support includes what language district administrators use to lead a district wide initiative on cultural competence.

I use discourse analysis to study language awareness. Gee (2014) defines "discourse analysis as the study of language at use in the world, not just to say things, but also to do things. People use language for lots of different things. They use it to communicate, co-operate, and to help others. They also use it to build things, lie, advantage themselves, harm people and destroy things" (p. 1).

Using the conceptual framework of language awareness, this study explored the relationship between central office leadership communication and support of historically marginalized students. Looking closely at how language shows commonality or disconnect in understanding and action, this study was guided by the following research questions: What language do administrators use to talk about their work with marginalized populations? How does this language influence practice?

Literature Review

The structure of the paper's literature review is divided into three main themes related to central office leadership and the support of marginalized student populations: a) central office administrators' language; b) why language matters to marginalized groups, and c) why language matters to marginalized groups in schools. I address each separately by exploring how language is used, heard and perceived in the context of communication.

When researching communication in this study, the term "language" is used interchangeably in this research with talk, discourse, and messaging. All describe a system of words or conversation, which is important to practitioners when looking at how central office administrators communicate.

Central Office Administrators and Language

In this section the discussion addresses how central office administrators' language influences success, derailment or failure of a district's vision. Some research has shown that central office administrators accomplish much of their work through discourse, both spoken and written. They use discourse to negotiate reforms, develop and implement policies, address conflicts, promote a particular school vision, and in each case either transform or maintain the status quo (Henze & Arriaza, 2006).

Furthermore, recognizing that language is central to engaging and motivating or disenfranchising stakeholders, central office administrators must be aware of the effects on stakeholders (central office administrators, building principals, teachers, community and students). Do they use clear, consistent language or mixed messaging when communicating the district's vision? Lowenhaupt's (2014) findings support the claim that "language is not simply an

accessory or aid to practice, but a core and defining component of the leadership and management practice that unfolds in schools" (p. 447).

Although the focus is not on central office leadership, a growing area of scholarship provides further insight into the role of language in education more broadly. This work emphasizes the importance of critical language awareness. Henze and Arriaza (2006) define critical language awareness as the application of critical discourse analysis as a force for change in actual domains of practice where unequal power relations are at issue. Some studies indicate a critical approach to language use can provide insights and tools that lead toward understanding how language impacts the way in which a district addresses an initiative (Bolitho, Carter, Hughes, Mashuhara, & Tomlinson, 2003; Henze & Arriaza, 2006). Central office administrators can be important change agents, as they are close enough to the daily life of the school to have intimate knowledge of its implicit culture and, at the same time, carry enough institutional authority to facilitate change. Other studies have cited that critical language awareness attempts to build the skill for language critique, including the capacities for reflective analysis of the educational process itself (Henze & Arriaza, 2006).

In addition, Henze and Arriaza's (2006) research on critical language awareness identifies the importance of central office administrators' understanding of language as a fundamental part of school district culture. Stakeholders use language to refer to common experiences, facts, ideas, and events, which can be communicated to those who speak the same language and share similar cultural backgrounds. Moreover, Bolitho et al., (2003) conclude that language awareness is a mental attribute, which develops through paying motivated attention to language use, and then gaining insights into how it works. This is possible for central office administrators because they share, to a large degree, the same knowledge of the world and school

and use a similar linguistic system to encode knowledge. An example of this would be their discourse practices. Often they might interrogate and redirect the nature of questions asked about schooling, and raise questions that have not been asked. Many everyday activities cannot exist without intentional language. Henze and Arriaza (2006) for instance assert that a casual conversation, email, telephone call, or announcement on the school public address (PA) system is an example of regular school activities that use language to convey a message.

They also argue that educators' beliefs and values are encoded in their daily communications. What central office administrators talk about and the ways they talk constitute a fundamental human activity. Ali (2011) claims that language awareness is a mental and internal capacity, which the central office administrator can develop by giving motivated and conscious attention to language and discovering patterns. People express their mental models in words, and in the case of social organizations such as schools, language influences all actions. How central office administrators implement NCLB is an example of this, as the discourse can be different from one district to the next. Mac Iver and Farley, (2003) address this issue by claiming that NCLB undoubtedly has had a significant impact on how district offices collect data and interpret results to pursue adequate yearly progress (AYP) and improve student achievement progress. Increased requirements for testing and reporting progress may encourage districts to take different strategic steps unrelated to instructional improvements simply to meet AYP requirements.

In addition to educators beliefs and values being encoded in daily conversation, several scholars have noted that the culture of school districts can also be replete with words that describe what educators consider important, including everything from labels for different kinds of children to names for different approaches to teaching (Henze & Arriaza, 2006). Given this

claim, central office administrators who recognize how language plays a key part in school organizations will find more developed capacity to move their agendas, engage stakeholders. and improve achievement gaps.

This work implies that besides critical language awareness being a fundamental part of culture, it also includes languages, dialects, and styles of speaking or writing that come to stand for or represent social identities (Ali, 2011). Critical language awareness looks at the relationship between language and social perspective. That is why conflicts arise over the use of different languages or dialects. In other words, when one group prohibits another from using its native language, the speakers view it as a rejection not of their language, but of their social group and their culture. For example, while the use of African American Vernacular English by White teens can be a badge of coolness among peers, it may be quickly denounced by White parents as "ghetto talk" that makes them sound like a marginalized group (Henze & Arriaza, 2006). Central office administrators must be aware that no matter how well intentioned, they are not likely to be successful in overcoming language barriers caused by their failure in not considering the home language system. They must be aware of the existence of the language system used by the students in their home community and use that knowledge as a way of helping them (Alim, Case, Luther, Arbor, & Luther, 2006). This can be especially true when central office administrators work to support marginalized populations.

Central office administrators also have the capacity, through language, to create new categories, new words, new relationships, new messages, and new patterns. Henze and Arriaza, (2006) suggest that educational discourse uses particular, identifiable wordings and patterns such as drop-outs, achievement, and college prep. In doing so under certain conditions of institutional support or grassroots advocacy, such changes in language can eventually become normalized.

English language learner, (ELL) is an example of this. When this happens, the new words become accepted and understood in defining a population.

Although there has been relatively limited research on the language of central office administrators, the few studies that exist suggest that it matters. Building on scholarship about education in general which emphasizes the importance of critical language awareness, I argue that central office administrators should be aware of the impact of their words and messaging. Taken together, this research suggests that language plays a critical role in central office administrators' ability to fulfill district vision, engage and motivate stakeholders, use daily communication, understand cultures, and support marginalized populations.

Why Does Language Matter to Marginalized Groups?

There is ample support that language and identity are inextricably linked. The connection is a sense of rootedness to particular places, cultures, histories, contexts, and politics. Dei and Rummens (2016) explored language and identity, and the social boundaries that serve to either include or exclude individuals and groups from access to social resources and statuses.

Social identities for marginalized populations include identities such as "African Americans," "Whites," "Latinx," "Asians," and "Native Americans," as well as "immigrants," "ELL students," "girls," "at-risk kids," and others. Terminology changes due to pressures for political correctness or group internal pressures to resist and transgress (for example, the use of *nigga* in gangster rap). This social compromise suggests that people unconsciously see language as a tool for social change. All of these shifts in terminology reflect a fundamental awareness that language influences social relations (Henze & Arriaza, 2006). Dei and Rummens (2016) claim, "The resulting personal and social identities may be myriad and complex; they may intersect or overlap; they are in constant flux, as they are constructed, negotiated, and sometimes

even contested. They also intersect with disadvantaged minority statuses in ways that either intensify oppressions and marginality or empower individuals to work for social change and transformation" (p. 50). They also argue that youth's personal and social identities are critically important in the learning process. They affect how young people see themselves, how they engage with schooling, how they themselves produce knowledge about everyday experiences and specific subject matter, and how both educators and school peers perceive them. Ali (2011) similarly notes the importance of language awareness for individuals as learners can differentiate between their own performance and others by paying attention to different language features. Howard (2010) claims that by developing and maintaining understanding of race and culture; and how they play out in school settings, central office administrators' begin to take important steps toward ameliorating persistent gaps in educational outcomes.

Indeed, for young people the development of their identities as unique individuals is an integral part of identity formation. This process occurs within societal contexts that seek to include, marginalize, or exclude individuals and the social groups to which they are seen to belong. Various cultural, racial, religious, linguistic, national, age, sex/gender, socio-economic, and other identifying criteria are used in these personal and social identification processes, all of which reflect various types of commonality or difference deemed socially salient at the time (Dei & Rummens, 2016).

Why Language Matter to Marginalized Groups in Schools

When central office administrators communicate initiatives to support marginalized populations, the identified populations and all stakeholders hear the words and are very much aware that processes of inclusion and exclusion are organized through particular identities. They are also aware that these processes not only affect them as individuals but also extend beyond to

the population categories or social groups with which they are identified and/or self-identify (Dei & Rummens, 2016). Central office administrators who are aware of language know that those who have been effectively marginalized can often readily identify specific moments that negate their selves, personhoods, and collective identities. In response, central office administrators must work to promote supportive and sensitive language to encourage success (Dei & Rummens, 2016) for all students.

Dei and Rummens also claim: "It is educators, who through their identifications, their seeing and not-seeing, their social inclusion or exclusion, and their language – relegate certain individuals and social groups toward the edge of the societal boundary, away from the core of import" (p. 50). Central office administrators who are aware of language and how it is linked to identity can work to support inclusion of marginalized populations. Along similar lines Howard (2007) notes that there are three factors which have a major impact on students' motivation and performance: their feelings of belonging, their trust in the people around them, and their intellectual competence. The type and use of discourse influences these critical factors.

Language and identity come into play when students on the margins of school success often possess different, not deficient, language and literacy practices in their home, which can be one cause of schools failure to reach these students. Often the student's different language is misunderstood and seen as a deficit. Deficit thinking inherent in the language of labeling can breed stereotypes and assumptions, which can also have consequences on outcome measurement. Labeling youth such as "at- risk" can have the consequences of a student not being motivated to succeed or to learn. Central office administrators who communicate with the community and with families build understanding between home and school so this does not happen. An example of correcting the deficiencies subsumed by language and labeling such as, "at-risk

youth" is to the goal of "promoting healthy development for youth". By learning about the full scope of language use and how language can actually be used, students become more conscious of their communicative behavior and the ways by which they can transform the conditions under which they live (Alim, 2005).

Central office administrators have the capacity to deliver messages of support to marginalized populations through language awareness. Lowenhaupt (2012) validates this view that talk or language is a critical dimension of the practice of leadership – talk is action. When central office administrators organize and are thoughtful about their language, the outcomes can be successful for all stakeholders, but most importantly the students. I argue that, central office administrators should be aware of what words they use, be aware of how their words are heard and understood by all stakeholders, it matters. There is ample support in how central office administrators should be aware of language use, Howard (2007), claims central office administrators should model for their colleagues inclusive and nonjudgmental discussion, reflection, and engagement to establish positive learning communities. Furthermore, Howard (2010) argues, the coincidence of the increasing cultural and ethnic heterogeneity of today's student population with the largely homogeneous school leadership requires important cross-cultural and racial awareness, as well as sensitivity to and understanding of diversity in all of its manifestations, including language.

Conclusion

In conclusion, central office administrators' language matters! Given the importance of identity and language, and in understanding the enormous pressure and urgency in turnaround districts, central office administrators' awareness of language toward marginalized groups is key to successful outcomes. Central office administrators' language use can impact marginalized

population's perceptions of themselves, their learning capabilities, and their place in the community. Central office administrators, who pay attention to how they use discourse, can provide marginalized groups a more inclusive environment to learn.

Methods

This qualitative case study was designed to explore the language of central office administrators and their work in support of historically marginalized populations, using interviews and documents collected and analyzed as part of a larger team research study. A full description of the methodology used can be found in chapter 2. This section outlines the data collection and analysis that focused on how central office leaders communicate in support of historically marginalized populations.

Context

I used a qualitative case study methodology, which is widely agreed to be an in-depth description of a bounded system (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Creswell, 2013). The bounded system, or unit around which there are boundaries (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), in this study is a school district in Massachusetts designated as a Level 5 district, and has turnaround status. Investigating the practices of central office administrators within one district allowed me to focus on collecting data on how they communicate and use language in support of marginalized populations.

Because the context is a Level 5 school, DESE committed substantial resources to the district, for developing research-based tools specifically designed to support continuous school improvement as well a three- year turnaround plan, which was a resource for data in this study.

Data Collection

Interviews. I conducted semi-structured interviews to better understand how central office administrators interact and use language in their work when striving to improve outcomes for historically marginalized populations. Typical of qualitative studies, semi-structured interviews was my primary source of data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I began collection of data in the fall of 2017. I interviewed all central office administrators, which included the Superintendent Receiver of Schools, Chief of Strategy and Turnaround, Executive Director of Secondary Education and Pathways, Chief Academic Officer, Chief of Pupil Services, Chief of Finance and Operations, Chief Talent Officer, Chief of Family Community Engagement and Executive Director of Schools. Each interview ranged from 45-60 minutes. I used a protocol of questions as developed in chapter 2. The flexibility of semi-structured interviews allowed the ability to probe and follow up on questions and responses.

Before beginning the interviews, participants were informed of my interest in the ways in which central office administrators interact, speak, and carry out their work in support of historically marginalized populations in the district. Participants were also informed that they could remain anonymous, but that their insights taken together may lead to recommendations for the district and the field writ large. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Notes were also taken during the interview.

I specifically address the language about marginalized students using discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is based on the details of speech that are relevant in the context where the speech was used and that are relevant to the argument of the analyst (Gee, 2014). Questions were focused on the language awareness of the person being interviewed. I not only listened to the words used, but also for what was not being said, what was unclear, what they were saying about

the subject, what were they trying to do, how did their words built or changed relationships, and how did their words connected or disconnected ideas and events. The following questions provided information regarding how central office administrators communication or language moved an agenda successfully or not, in support of marginalized populations: (1) What language do you use to talk about marginalized populations? (2) How does this language influence the work that you are doing with marginalized populations? and (3) What messages do you think marginalized students hear?

Document review. To enrich the data collected in interviews, public and private records were examined in a document review (Creswell, 2012). The documents reviewed included student data to gain an understanding of the historically marginalized populations served in the district. Other documents that was reviewed included letters sent by central office administrators, strategic plans, school improvements plans, any level 5 related documents that related to the areas of marginalized populations. I paid particular attention to the language used in these documents in relationship to marginalized populations. Review of these documents supplemented the semi-structured interviews.

Data Analysis

Data collection and analysis were simultaneous as stated in chapter 2. Analysis began as soon as data were collected. Each interview was followed by a research journal entry. Separate entries were written after each analysis in order to capture reflections, tentative themes, hunches, ideas, and additional questions I wanted to pursue based on what was derived from the data set. Analysis became more intensive as the study progressed and once all data was collected (Merriam, 2009).

I used discourse analysis as it addresses not only the details of language (Gee, 2014), but also concentrates on ideas, issues, and themes as they are expressed in talk and writing. Using a discourse analysis protocol, I utilized tools, which provided specific questions to ask of data and assisted in answering my research questions. I initially started with seven tools:

(1) The Fill in Tool addresses what was said, the context in which it was said, and what needs to be filled in to achieve clarity. This tool was used to try to understand what someone meant, what they are/were trying to say, what their intentions were, and what goals or purpose they are/were trying to achieve.

(2) The Making Strange Tool asks the listener to act as an outsider, to ask what would someone find strange, (unclear, confusing or worth questioning). As we are not consciously aware of all we mean and of all our motives, we can discover new things about ourselves when others study us or we consciously reflect, after action, on what we have said and done.

(3) The Subject Tool asks why speakers have chosen the subject/topics they have and what they are saying about the subject.

(4) The Doing and Not Just Saying Tool asks not what the speaker is saying, but what the speaker is trying to do. The tool was used because language is used for different functions, not just to convey information.

(5) The Relationship Tool asks how words are being used to build and sustain or change relationships among the speaker, other people, social groups, cultures and/or institutions. This tool was used to look at different sorts of relationships and the impact of language on these relationships.

(6) The Connection Building Tool asks how the words being used in the communication connect, ignore or disconnect important ideas within communication. The tool was used because

connections are not explicit and the speaker often assumes the listener will make them. Sometimes the speaker wants to manipulate more overtly how listeners think about particular connections and what connections they make in their minds, so they word what they have to say to accomplish what they want.

(7) The Identities Building Tool asks what socially recognizable identity or identities the speaker is trying to enact or to get others to recognize. It addresses how the speaker's language treats other people's identities and what sorts of identities the speaker recognizes for others in relationship to his or her own. This tool was used as we are all members of different cultures, social groups, and institutions and have different sorts of roles and relationships. In each of these, we have to talk and act in certain ways (Gee, 2014).

Table 4

Discourse Analysis Tool

TheTool	Definition	Questions
The Fill In Tool	This tool works to understand what someone meant, what they are trying to say, what their intentions were and what they are trying to achieve.	Given context what needs to be filled in for clarity? What is not being said overtly, but assumed known or inferable?
The Making Strange Tool	The tool works to raise greater consciousness about meaning and motives.	What would an outsider find strange, unclear, confusing, worth questioning?
The Subject Tool	The tool examines how speakers choose subjects and what they choose to say about them.	Why did the speakers choose the specific subject/topics and what they are saying about the subject?
The Doing and Not Just Saying Tool	This tool interrogates the many functions and purpose of language.	What is the speaker saying, but also what he or she is trying to do? (The speaker may be trying to do more than one thing).
The Relationship Tool	This tool looks at how the speaker uses language to sustain, modify, change and impact relationships between the speaker and others.	How are words being used to build and sustain or change relationships among the speaker, other people, social groups, cultures and/or institutions?
The Connection Building Tool	This tool examines how language connects, disconnects, ignores or makes irrelevant connections between ideas.	How are words and grammar being used in a communication to make ideas relevant or irrelevant to other ideas or to ignore their relevance to each other?
The Identities Building Tool	This tool looks at how language constructs cultural, social, and institutional identities, roles and relationships.	What socially recognizable identity or identities is the speaker trying to enact or to get others to recognize? How the speaker's language does treats other people's identities?

Text segment coding and labeling were utilized to organize data to form descriptions and broad themes (Creswell, 2012). The coding process included examining for overlap and redundancy, collapsing data into broad themes by determining what data to use, and which to disregard (Creswell, 2012). Coding revealed that only four tools resonated: The Fill in Tool, The Identity Building Tool, The Connections Tool, and the Relationship Tool. An example of The Fill in Tool, "I feel like we're just on the go, react and react, rather than having time to sit in a room and have a couple hours to really hash things out." This excerpt demonstrates the use of the fill in tool. "Just on the go, react and react" and "really hash things out" are examine by asking what is not being said, what is known. An example of The Identity Building Tool;

> They look around and they see a lot of educators who don't look like them and don't know their experience. I think they get many messages that say…And our parents do, that they are inferior, that their experiences are inferior, or that their opinion does not matter in the same way because of language, education, access, poverty, mental health issues, all of… many of those things get factored in. I think they get a lot of negative messages from our district about…capping their potentials.

"I think they get many messages": "their experiences are inferior," "their opinion does not matter in the same way because of language, education, access, poverty, mental health issues….they get a lot of negative messages" thus "capping their potentials." Questions such as how does the speaker's language treat other people's identities and what is the speaker trying to enact or get others to recognize, are used to examine how the speaker uses language to impact the relationship and others.

An example of the connection Tool; "What I'm finding, there's a lot of professional hurt related to receivership. Teachers didn't want it, Principals didn't want it, and the community at large didn't want it. They didn't know what to expect, like they thought it was going to be like wipe everything out, wipe everyone out." "Professional hurt," "didn't know what to expect," and "thought it was going to wipe everyone and everything out" are examples of how language can connect or disconnect ideas. Lastly, the following is an example of The Relationship Tool: "It needs to have a communication component so that families understand what's happening…The families need to know if there's no true partnership between schools and families, how that [is] relationship building, so the families feel that staff and the district has the best interest of their kids at heart?" Responses such as "Families need to know," "how is that relationship building," and "best interest of their kids," demonstrate how words are used to build, sustain or change relationships among the speaker, or other people.

Interview results along with document review explored explore patterns of language of central office administrators in different structural positions (central and building level). Collected documents helped to triangulate data collected in interviews (Creswell, 2012). This process of corroborating evidence supported the broad themes determined and enhanced the validity of the study. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim using Rev, a mobile application and transcription service. As stated in chapter 2 the transcription data were then coded. I noted every time there was a mention of marginalized populations, tagged or coded them, for example by negative or positive words, subject, attitudes, inclusive or exclusive words. I then framed them and look for themes such as motivation because of a mandate, social justice, a problem or issue. An inductive analysis was used in order to allow other themes to emerge.

Findings

Results of using the four discourse analysis tools to analyze central office administrators' language about traditionally marginalized students revealed four key findings. Central office administrators' language reflected language of frustration. They spoke about lack of time for discussion, poor or inadequate process and a behavior of reaction to issues as they described marginalized students. Second, some participants recognized a language of implicit bias among their colleagues, while others demonstrated language of implicit bias in their own language during interviews. Third, participants primarily used mandated language when discussing the need to be compliant with state and federal laws when addressing the needs of traditionally marginalized students. Last, participants used a language of care when talking about why they worked in this turnaround district and of the importance of the work.

Language of Frustration

Interview data illuminated language of frustration. This language derived from the complexity and urgency of the workload required in a turnaround district. Language of frustration included words of disappointment when discussing inability to accomplish tasks and, goals or feelings of constraint. Overall analysis of transcripts from central office administrators revealed thirty-two excerpts from all nine participants that demonstrated the language of frustration, disappointment and feelings of inadequacy. One illustrative example of this language of frustration came from a participant who said, "I think we are in a bit of a mess. I'm a structure and systems thinker, …I was mad as hell yesterday because I know that some basic stuff isn't happening and I'm trying to think what structure do I set up to make this damn stuff happen". Language such as "mess," "basic," and "make this damn stuff happen" imply obstructed or insufficient ability to provide what is needed as well an urgency to get the work done. The

helplessness expressed here reveals a sense of frustration with the structural issues facing district leaders. Structural issues such as changing of positions, lack of clarity of roles, and changes in processes and procedures obstructed central office administrators' progress toward serving marginalized populations, which led to extreme frustration.

Another participant identified this frustration as stemming from the lack of clear roles for central office administrators. He explained, "Role definition and decision making authority are unclear and ever changing. It creates inefficiency." The words "unclear," "ever changing," and "inefficiency" convey feelings of inadequacy and suggest central office administrators' inability to follow through with work needed to support the district. Both examples present language of frustration that limits moving their work forward.

Similarly, language of frustration was shared in another excerpt, "It's about conversations about how do we make sure that we have policies that are culturally responsive, sensitive, biased or non-biased. An internal issue is bubbling up, that we really should have addressed and needs addressing in the system. I feel like we're just on the go, react, and react, rather than having time to sit in a room and have a couple of hours to really hash things out." Language such as "bubbling up," and "that really should have been addressed and needs to be addressed" point out feelings of inadequacy and resentment that the district is not always doing what is needed and is limited by "we're just on the go, react, and react" and the inability to "sit down and hash things out." This participant expressed words of exasperation over the inability to take time to be proactive, talk, and process what actions are best instead of always reacting to a situation.

Turn around districts are complex and are provided limited time to improve their status, easily creating language of frustration as central office administrators tackle the issues that are impacting the success of all students. Traditionally marginalized students exposed to central

office administrators' language of frustration may compound their inability to feel supported and included. Messages received from language of frustration are central office administrators are too busy to be bothered or the marginalized student is a burden for the central office administrators. It may also suggest that central office administrators are trying to do their job but are hampered by bureaucracy.

Implicit Bias

Interview data collected showed a second finding of participant's language recognizing or suggesting implicit bias. Implicit bias, is defined as referring to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner (Kirwan Institute, 2015). A language of implicit bias was illustrated in twenty-seven excerpts and was present in all nine central office administrators' language that marginalized populations heard or saw.

All nine participants identified the presence of implicit bias in their work with others in the district. As one participant explained,

> We try to emphasize the need to remind people that it hasn't always been about *all*, and there have been successes only for *some*. The majority of our students particularly our students of color, have not performed well. We use terms like marginalized, we have used terms like underserved and at times, I have thrown out the word oppressed. I have been selective about where I use that word, but it is about oppressive practices and systems that exist in both the city and the schools. Both contribute to the results that we have seen and the outcome we have seen in our kids.

This language implies the administrator's recognition of implicit bias and connects understanding how marginalized populations have not always been included. This is further

demonstrated by "remind people that it hasn't always been about all" and "it's about oppressive practices and systems that exist both in the city and the schools." This administrator recognized the presence in the district of language that revealed implicit biases about students and their families.

Discourse analyses of the language used in interviews also revealed examples embedded with bias. One participant said,

> There's a bunch of kids that don't want to go to school. In this environment, they will fry, so they resist going to school. There are bunches of other things that add up to the absenteeism, such as the choices parents make. One example is in marginalized or underserved community, you have appointments galore. The amount of times the low-income folks, poor people, spend going from appointment to appointment, to try to secure their basic needs, is crazy. Basic needs are one thing, and then all the medical issues, health issues, that they have. The appointments during the school day are ridiculous. They have appointments where they stay out during the rest of the day, and don't come back.

This language demonstrates implicit bias by about identity, attitude, and stereotypes about groups of people. "There's a bunch of kids," "low income folks, poor people," "children of poor and/or low income" that "don't come back" and "fry" in this institutional environment because of truancy due to appointments necessary to assure basic survival. The language is rife with assumptions and almost explicit bias about marginalized students and groups.

Similarly, another participant explained,

> I don't know how much you've dealt with the alternative high school population, but they're like the most realistic people you'll ever meet, there's no bones there. We are

> very realistic with them and their families, because you have to cut right to brass tacks with those kids. Like look, your job, you have to be here. And if you're not here, we're going to bust your ass until you get yourself in here.

Language such as "alternative high school population, but they're like the most realistic people," and "cut to brass tacks with those kids" demonstrate implicit bias and suggests that all individuals in alternative educational programs need to be addressed in a certain or similar way. It may also suggest "tough love" asserting that students must be here to accrue power, which would be the language of caring.

Lastly, some participants recognized the importance of language in breaking down implicit bias. These administrators noted that their language must be proactive and sensitive to implicit bias in supporting marginalized populations. For example, one participant said:

> They look around and they see a lot of educators who don't look like them and don't know their experience. I think they get many messages that say…And our parents do, that they are inferior, that their experiences are inferior, or that their opinion does not matter in the same way because of language, education, access, poverty, mental health issues, all of… many of those things get factored in. I think they get a lot of negative messages from our district about…capping their potentials.

This administrator recognizes that traditionally marginalized populations might feel they are not supported, excluded or treated differently when hearing language that districts use. Another noted that, "I learned the hard way that some people get offended when you use the word "SPED" or how you refer to English Language Learners. There used to be a term, bilingual and it has a negative connotation here." These administrators recognized that identity and language

are connected and impact how marginalized students perceive themselves. Understanding attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions, these administrators recognized that purposeful use of language is an important component in supporting or limiting traditionally marginalized populations in a turnaround district.

Mandated Language

Participants relied on the expressions of mandated language when describing their support of marginalized populations. These expressions occurred when they discussed state or federal laws that school districts must abide. Mandates influenced the language they used as they discussed guidelines, programs, and procedures to support marginalized populations. Five out of the nine central office administrators interviewed provided ten excerpts demonstrating expressions of mandated language.

Excerpts illustrated central office administrators' "clear understanding about what they need to do to put the district in compliance." For example, one administrator explained,

> The external pressure comes from just the compliance around our special populations, and our EL…our overrepresentation of students in those different categories, the external pressure is to get those numbers more in line with districts that are similar to ours and nationally, our numbers are high in some of those areas. The external pressure is to make sure we are in compliance and we are not identifying students incorrectly. I think internally, there's a shift that we have to take ownership of our failed district.

This administrator recognizes the importance of the district taking responsibility for failure in compliance to improve achievement for all students.

Another participant referred to a mandate in his explanation,

> Probably the clearest message they've had this year is that we need to have everything translated in both languages and to at least start with Google translate…we don't want you not to communicate with families because you're afraid or are feeling concerned about the translation, at least start with that. We have had external pressure on compliance for English language learners or English learners.

In this excerpt, the participant emphasizes the importance of ensuring that the schools provide translation of all district documentation and thus invite and encourage marginalized populations access to the dialogue and mission.

Expressions of mandated language are about compliance and requirements especially in a turnaround district, which has many areas of non-compliance. This translates directly into the language participants used when describing students in traditionally marginalized groups. For example, participants described students with disabilities in relation to the requirements for compliance in the special education system. As one person put it, "The level of over-identification of kids for IEP's is just huge. Historically that's why we're in the compliance danger zone…because targeted interventions have not been happening at the classroom level." This participant recognizes that the **district** has failed to provide appropriate supportive services prior to referral for special education eligibility. Similarly, another excerpt continues, "Special education benchmarks are around compliance. It affects our populations because it is not only our process for determining eligibility but also timelines of team meetings and timeliness of re-evaluation. We've had a lot of issues over the years with compliance in that respect, but it trickles down to compliance to actual provision of services to our students that need it the most." The central office administrators' expressions of mandated language provided a sense of

importance, urgency, and understanding that it is of high priority in supporting marginalized populations.

Language of Care

Finally, participants used language of care when talking about the importance of turnaround work.

> The main thing that attracted [me] was that opportunity of the turnaround in a community that is half Puerto Rican. That is where I am from, Puerto Rico. To see that we have had a couple of generations of kids that have not been served well by the district and it is my people. That's shameful.

Words such as "shameful" and "not served well" allude to this administrator's empathy and recognition that Puerto Rican students are not receiving the supportive services they require or deserve. Another participant,

> …When you start to work in an urban population and see inequity in education and there's a way you can fix it…that's really what drives my work. I believe that it can be, that the gap can be bridged, and I am trying to develop processes that can help aid that.

This excerpt recognizes the importance, urgency, and care of their work as illustrated by words such as "drive," "fix," and "bridged."

Lastly, this excerpt shows language of care as the participant talks about the importance of turnaround work and being in this district.

> I was born and raised in this town. I went through the school system. Every time I said no [to the job offer of working in the district], I would go home and feel really bad about it. I felt like I was turning my back on my hometown when they

> really needed me. I felt that the work that I could do here could be impactful. I know it is a lot of work for the first, hopefully for the first three years …it has to get better.

Together these data suggest that central office administrators' language matters and influences how they support marginalized populations. They relied on language of frustration when they talked about lack of time for discussion, poor process, and reactive behavior instead of proactive behavior. Some recognized the use of implicit bias language and others demonstrated implicit bias in their language. They relied on expressions of mandated language when discussing the need to be compliant with state and federal laws. Lastly, they used language of care to talk about what led them to do this important work.

Discussion

The focus of the discussion is guided by the research questions: What language do administrators use to talk about their work with marginalized populations? How does this language influence practice?

It is also guided by understanding the definition of a turnaround district: (1) the district represents one of the lowest performing school districts; (2) the district needs the most supports the state could provide for absolute achievement, student growth and improvement trends on standardized state assessments; and (3) the district has a three-year period to improve student achievement. Given this guidance, the findings of language of frustration, a language of implicit bias, mandated language, and language of care strongly emphasize the importance of understanding what leaders use discourse to talk about their work with marginalized populations and how that discourse influences their practice.

The literature review showed that central office administrators accomplish much of their

work through discourse, both spoken and written. They use discourse to negotiate reforms, develop and implement policies, address conflicts, promote a particular school vision, and in each case either transform or maintain the status quo (Henze & Arriaza, 2006). In reviewing the literature and in understanding turnaround districts, it was understandable to hear frustration in the language, implicit bias and talk of mandates. The workload that district leaders face is complex: central office restructuring, addressing non-compliance issues, and creating new processes and procedures across the district, and addressing city and school district social issues, must all be completed within a constraining three-year time line. It is likely that when marginalized populations hear the language of central office administrators, they too sense frustration, bias, and urgency and interpret the charge to improve achievement of all students as burdensome and difficult.

Some central office administrators noted that when traditionally marginalized populations do not see educators that look like them or know their experience, they get a message of being inferior. This second finding suggested that central office administrators are aware of implicit bias in language of others and the institutions: and that some central office administrators use language embedded with implicit bias. Central office administrators who are aware of language know that those who have been marginalized can readily identify specific moments that negate their self, personhood, and collective identities. In response, central office administrators must work to promote supportive and sensitive language to encourage success (Dei & Rummens, 2016) for all students. The researchers claim, "It is educators, who through their identifications, their seeing and not-seeing, their social inclusion or exclusion, and their language – relegate certain individuals and social groups toward the edge of the societal boundary, away from the

core of import" (p. 50). These central office administrators understand the importance of language being proactive and sensitive to traditionally marginalized populations' experiences. Implicit bias in language use and recognizing implicit bias is an important finding as each central office administrator interviewed was clear in wanting to support all constituencies.

The third finding, which identified the district's non-compliance in state and federal mandates, has a large impact on supporting students. This urgency to comply pervaded central office administrators' language: "I feel like we're just on the go" trying to meet deadlines and mandates. This used mandated language to support the need to take corrective action. "We have to take ownership of our failed district." Literature reviewed showed that central office administrators could be important change agents, as they are close enough to the daily life of the school to have intimate knowledge of its implicit culture and, at the same time, carry enough institutional authority to facilitate change.

In addition to language of frustration, implicit bias and expressions of mandated language, central office administrators used a language of care. They conveyed an attitude of being in the district for the long haul and wanting to provide supports for the success of all students.

> I did intentionally build a cabinet that I thought was more representative of the population we serve, than what are schools look like. Puerto Rican, Mexican, women, men, people from the community and others not. Those are important decisions, symbolically. It sends a powerful message to schools about what we value, people, who speak the language, who speak Spanish. I think those have been important decisions about better serving; I think it is a start. It does not cure

> us of any issues, but it sends a powerful message to the community about our investment in, our commitment to hiring staff that reflects who we serve.

Language of frustration, implicit bias, mandated language and caring reflect the literature and turnaround work when central office administrators organize and are thoughtful about the importance of language use; the outcomes can be successful for all stakeholders, but most importantly the students.

Limitations

There are limitations as noted in our overall research study. First, our case study research focused on a single unit of analysis. I examined the practices of one district's use of language and communication and therefore this study is not generalized to widespread practices of central office administrators' language use and communication in support of marginalized populations. In addition, because we did our research in a turnaround district, some leadership action in support of marginalized students was in their infancy or even the planning stages. This could have influenced the data analysis. While our research team used collaborative coding to maintain awareness of potential biases among our research team, it was more difficult to control biases that were present among the research participants.

Conclusion

This study describes central office administrators' communication in support of marginalized populations with a particular focus on language use. Using language awareness and discourse analysis tools provided insights toward understanding how language has an impact on how a district addresses an initiative (Bolitho et al., 2003; Henze & Arriaza, 2006). Interviews and document review offered data on how central office administrators use language to support marginalized populations. It is possible to learn how central office administrators frame

problems as well recognize challenges from the language they use to describe the work they are doing to support marginalized students. It is also possible to learn whether or not there is clear, consistent language among stakeholders.

These findings have implications for both researchers and practitioners, as there is a lack of research in this area. Given the importance of language in school leadership, further research, qualitative or quantitative, should emerge from this study to explore more than one district as well examine the outcomes of the impact of central office administrators language use and their support of marginalized populations.

CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

Discussion

This study aimed to explore how central office administrators in a turnaround district organized their work in support of marginalized student populations. In doing so, our research team examined leadership actions through four distinct lenses related to communication (Palmer, 2018), collaboration (Smith, 2018), policy implementation (Galligan, 2018), and social network ties between and among district leaders (Kukenberger, 2018). Through the use of semi-structured interviews and document review, Galligan (2018) examined the policy implementation process of the central office administrators in a Massachusetts turnaround district focusing specifically on their ability to work together and balance internal and external policy demands with the purpose of better supporting marginalized students. Kukenberger (2018) considered and analyzed how the structure and flow of social relations between and among the central office administrators affect turnaround efforts and goals designed to support marginalized populations. In the same district context, Palmer (2018) explored the relationship between central office administrators' language and their support of historically marginalized students. Specifically, Palmer looked closely at how language shows commonality or disconnect in understanding and action between and among central office administrators when they work to support marginalized students. Smith (2018) studied the conditions that foster or hinder collaboration when working to improve outcomes for historically marginalized students and how communities of practice emerge among central office administrators.

Three central findings emerged following an in-depth analysis and synthesis of each individual study. First, as required by the Massachusetts system for support, central office administrators organized their work in support of marginalized students in accordance with external, turnaround policy demands. Second, as the district transitioned into receivership (Accountability, Partnerships and Targeted Assistance, 2017), evolving organizational structures and systems posed various barriers and opportunities to accelerate improvement for these students. Third, the specific emotions central office administrators described seemed to influence progress toward signature benchmarks and goal attainment meant to improve outcomes for marginalized students in the district.

The following sections discuss these findings and their implications for both practice and future research. First, we discuss each of the three key findings regarding how central office administrators in this turnaround district organized their work in support of marginalized populations. Second, we provide recommendations for practitioners. Third, we expose the limitations of this study and provide recommendations for future research.

Central Office Administrators Organized Their Work in Accordance with Turnaround Policy

Collective findings indicated that central office administrators in this district organized their work in support of marginalized students in accordance with turnaround policy. As previously mentioned, the turnaround plan identified five broad goals that are either explicitly or implicitly designed to benefit traditionally marginalized students. A synthesis of findings from each author's individual studies revealed that as central office administrators organized their work around turnaround policy, they attempted to bring structure and focus to their work by

scaffolding the amount of work needed to meet broad turnaround goals. As we discuss below, this structure offered benefits and challenges.

Central office administrators scaffold turnaround goals. Research on central office leadership suggests that school reform depends on a highly effective and efficient central office leadership team (Honig, 2013; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Additional scholarly research on school reform designed to support marginalized populations identifies the importance of a collective approach to this difficult work (Datnow & Park, 2009). Since turnaround plan goals are rather broad, central office administrators in this district scaffolded the workload needed to achieve these goals over time. For the purpose of this study, we defined scaffolding as the creation of levels of support and clarity that attempt to simplify the work needed to reach the turnaround goals. In other words, large broad goals meant to support marginalized students were broken down into smaller, more specific action steps representing short-term actions needed to reach the long-term goals written in the turnaround plan.

The primary way that central office administrators in this district scaffolded their work was through the creation of annual benchmarks. These benchmarks were developed, revised, or created in part at the annual summer retreat for all central office administrators. During the three years of receivership, the number of annual benchmarks decreased each year. During the period of study, the district had 31 benchmarks, five of them dubbed "signature benchmarks." All central office administrators identified their work in support of marginalized students in reference to the annual benchmarks. When central office administrators were in meetings, they provided updates to each other regarding the status of their work in terms of progress towards meeting these benchmarks.

Although the annual benchmarks were more specific than the turnaround goals, central office administrators attempted to provide additional focus to their work through the creation of project plans. These plans were developed in collaboration with the Chief Academic Officer and guided the day-to-day short-term work needed to meet the annual benchmarks. All of this work was intended to better support traditionally marginalized students in the district. Communication around these project plans flowed within departments, from one central office administrator and the team of employees that h/she supervised, with regularity. Communication about project plans from once central office administrator to another happened with less frequency.

Benefits and challenges. The approach of scaffolding the broad goals of the district turnaround plan into smaller, more manageable steps provided both benefits and challenges for the district. Since turnaround results across the country have come with mixed results, there is no single approach that researchers or practitioners have identified as the most beneficial way to approach turnaround work. Additionally, the sheer number of changes required within the short timeline provided for change places turnaround schools and districts under tremendous pressure (Finnigan, Daly & Stewart, 2012; Mette & Scribner, 2014; Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005).

With no silver bullet for approaching turnaround work in support of marginalized populations, the central office administrators in this district took a seemingly logical and efficient approach to the daunting task of overhauling a district in a three-year time frame. The primary benefit to this approach was a collective understanding of the turnaround plan and its implications for traditionally marginalized students by each central office administrator, as well as the collective value placed on the goals within the plan. It would seem that if each central office administrator shared an understanding of and an appreciation for the turnaround plan, this similar understanding and appreciation would guide the work they do on a daily basis.

Additionally, the identification of signature benchmarks provided focus to the work of central office administrators in terms of identifying priorities and high leverage areas of improvement for marginalized students.

This approach also aimed to foster collaboration and communication. Through updates provided to key central office administrators, they were able to track the status of progress towards goals and benchmarks. Through periodic meetings and retreats, central office administrators updated other central office administrators who oversee different departments on the progress of their work. This gave each central office administrator some sense of the work in support of marginalized populations that occurred in other areas, and provided the opportunity for feedback.

While this process was efficient given the number of benchmarks and the relatively short time frame to reach each one, this process also offered challenges. While there was a shared understanding of the work in support of marginalized populations and some collaboration and communication across the central office, a collective approach to carrying out the work was not the focus of the central office administrators in this district. As a result, a central office administrator's understanding of how all of the work interrelated or interesected may have been limited.

Another challenge to this approach was likely not unique to this district, but coud be a shared challenge for many turnaround schools and districts working to better support marginalized student populations. The natural pressures of reaching so many goals in such a short amount of time may have limited exploration, creativity and learning among central office administrators (Finnigan, Daly, & Stewart, 2012). Instead of spending time together negotiating a joint enterprise, and then planning, testing, and analyzing interventions, central office

administrators had to work as quickly as possible, while sustaining a high degree of critical reflecction, during their work in support of marginalized populations. If time was not a tremendous pressure, the central office team could likely have benefitted from more opportunities to learn collectivelly, plan new interventions, and analyze results together, potentially resulting in more creative and focused work in support of marginalized populations.

Summary. Central office administrators in this district organized their work by scaffolding large, broad turnaround goals into smaller, more manageable benchmarks and project plans. This work was meant to support traditionally marginalized populations in this turnaround district, and the scaffolded approach guided the daily work of each member of the team. While this approach was efficient given the numerous goals and short time frame allotted for completion, it may have limited the ability for central office administrators to fully understand each other's work, and to work collectively over time to find the most creative and targeted ways to meet turnaround goals and benchmarks. We now turn to the evolving organizational structure in the district and the benefits and challenges of this structure.

Evolving Organizational Structure Poses Opportunities for Success and Challenges

Findings underscored the extent to which the central office had been reorganized since receivership. A synthesis of findings suggests that while the reorganization was intended to indirectly improve outcomes for historically marginalized populations, it provided both opportunities for success and challenges.

Reorganization of central office. As previously stated, the district went into receivership in April 2015 after being designated as Level 5 and the receiver was appointed in July 2015. Since that time, the district underwent, and continues to undergo, significant restructuring. Since entering into receivership, all of the nine central office administrators were

appointed to their roles and eight of the nine are also new to the district. In addition to hiring new administrators to fill existing central office administrator positions, the district also created new central office administrator positions. The creation of these new positions, one of which was created in July 2017, led to shifting responsibilities of other administrators. With each new administrator joining the leadership team, and at times filling a role that did not previously exist, the work of existing administrators shifted. This, in turn, led central office administrators to rethink their meeting structure.

Collaboration and joint work in support of marginalized populations occurred during meetings in the district and, at the time of data collection, there was some feeling that the right people were not always at the table for district-level meetings. This led some to feel that the efforts to improve collaboration was solely intended for school-based teams. The district made changes to the meeting structure during the fall of 2017 in an effort to build cohesion to the work of central office administrators. It is important to recognize that our findings capture a snapshot at a time of change, and do not represent the entire album of change.

Benefits and challenges. The evolving organizational structure of the central office has provided opportunities for success, as well as challenges in terms of support for marginalized students. A central office team of new administrators can be a challenge as administrators in a turnaround context are tasked with implementation of district-wide change with a limited understanding of the history and context of the work in the district. Further, relationships of central office administrators impact improvement efforts (Collins & Clark, 2003; Honig 2006) and newly formed teams have not had the time to develop relationships characterized by trust, which facilitates improvement.

At the same time, these new administrators brought new perspectives and ideas to the district, and they brought their existing networks and relationships to play as they sought external advice and support. In this district, the hiring of new central office administrators provided an opportunity to increase the diversity of central office administrators. Research points to the importance of a diverse staff, particularly in districts serving a diverse student population or a population such as the one in the district studied, in which most students are students of color (Alim, 2005). In line with this body of research, a specific recruitment strategy was employed to attract the individuals to their new central office roles and diversify the central office to be more representative of the population served in the district. The intentional development of a diverse leadership team that is more representative of the student population served in the district should be viewed positively. With male and female administrators, two Puerto Rican administrators, one Mexican administrator, and one who is half Cuban, the administrative team could more easily approach their work to support marginalized populations with an understanding of the culture and values of families in the district (Hammond, 2015).

The work of central office administrators was organized and planned in meetings, which included cabinet meetings, quarterly retreats, and department meetings. Quarterly retreats and cabinet meetings were regarded as meetings for central office administrators to work together to create annual goals and benchmarks meant to support marginalized students, and to update one another on progress towards these goals. While participation in these meetings created clarity on district goals and benchmarks and broadly connected the work of central office administrators around improving outcomes for all students, there was a feeling that the right people were not always at the table for meetings. The addition of new central office administrators and shifting

roles contributed to this challenge and at the time of data collection, the district was taking steps to ensure the meeting structure worked better for central office administrators.

Research suggests external partners can provide the tools, expertise, and other resources that support improvement and change at the district level (Farrell & Coburn, 2017; Honig & Ikemoto, 2008) and can be heavily relied on as part of turnaround efforts (Le Floch, Boyle, & Therriault, 2008). This was evident in the district when central office administrators highlighted the multiple external partners they work with on a regular basis. One partnership that was viewed as particularly productive was the partnership with ESE. This partnership seemed to contribute to the development of new ideas and a collaborative approach towards organizing their work in support of marginalized populations. In addition, central office administrators talked about partnerships they had from their previous work prior to working in the district that they leveraged in their new roles in the district.

Summary. Since entering receivership, the central office has been and continues to be reorganized. While the reorganization was intended to improve outcomes for historically marginalized populations, it provided both opportunities for success and challenges. Hiring new administrators provided the opportunity to diversify the central office while posing challenges with regard to their collective knowledge and understanding of the district context. The work of central office administrators was organized and planned in meetings, which continued to be restructured as new administrators joined the central office team. Similar to other turnaround districts, external partnerships, in particular the partnership with ESE, was a structure that central office administrators viewed positively and that contributed to the development of new ideas.

The importance of the affective side of turnaround leadership

Turnaround work is complex and places an enormous amount of emotional pressure on central office administrators as they work to address various issues that impact academic achievement for marginalized students. The three-year period to improve student outcomes creates urgency in central office administrators as they work to meet the turnaround plan goals. Tremendous pressure and short timelines to reach goals can correlate with limited school improvements (Finnigan, Daly & Stewart, 2012).

Consistent with Mintrop and Trujillo (2006), Friedman, Galligan, Albano, and O'Connor (2009), concluded that intense pressure and sanctions critically impact turnaround efforts. These demands can also create defensiveness and deprofessionalize teachers, administrators, and staff. In this district, interview data provided evidence of these pressures among central office administrators. Central office administrators described their actions to reorganize and shift priorities, achieve and maintain compliance, and communicate changes to constituents in order to better support and serve traditionally marginalized populations.

A synthesis of findings from individual lines of inquiry revealed three prominent emotions of central office administrators in this turnaround district as they worked to support marginalized students: (1) frustration; (2) lack of cohesion among team members and, (3) the emotional toll of turnaround work.

Frustration. Findings from Palmer (2018) illuminated language of frustration when participants discussed working in support of marginalized students. This language derived from the complexity and urgency of the workload required in a turnaround district. Language of frustration included words of disappointment when discussing the inability to accomplish tasks and goals, or feelings of constraint. This came from trying to organize or meet with others to

discuss obstacles or concerns. Their expressed helplessness also revealed a sense of frustration with the structural issues facing district leaders. The complexities and limited time to improve status created frustration as central office administrators attempted to tackle the issues that impacted the success of all students. Exposure to central office administrators' frustrations may compound students' inability to feel supported and negatively impact their sense of belonging.

Lack of feeling cohesive among team members. Findings from Galligan (2018) and Smith (2018) suggested time, lack of clarity around roles, and decision-making authority, periodic problems with follow through, and communication structures limited the ability of the central office team to co-construct and implement policy in support of marginalized populations cohesively. These central office administrators found themselves reacting to issues and needing to prioritize issues during their day-to-day work. These feelings of lack of cohesion resonated when central office administrators did not have the time, clarity, or organizational structure to support marginalized populations.

Similarly, Kukenberger (2018) found that central office administrators in this district relied heavily on various external ties rather than internal ties. It is possible that this reliance on external ties is related to network instability, since there has been stability in the form of a state partnership since the district went into receivership. In general, network instability can impact the work of the central office leadership team and the district's ability to make measurable progress towards turnaround goals designed to support marginalized student populations. Research on school reform indicates that leadership turnover and inconsistent organizational structures limit and strain relational ties between and among central office administrators as they work to support marginalized populations (Leithwood, 2013).

Emotional toll. Central office administrators working in support of marginalized populations in a turnaround district expereinced feelings consistent with Theorharis' (2007) description of social justice leaders facing resistance and the meotional toll this resistance creates. Central office administrators often face resistance in a turnaround district from many stakeholders, such as teachers, administrators, students, families, and community members.

Central office administrators in this district were purposeful in their work, as they used the turnaround plan as a guide to attempt to improve student outcomes. They had to implement strategies for professional and personal self-care to keep the emotional toll from the work at bay. When central office administrators in a turnaround district do this successfully, they can make significant accomplishments in their work to support marginalized students. The daily requirements of what can be described as a "nearly impossible" job, combined with a belief that they can and must create just schools for all students, can take an emotional toll on these central office administrators. This toll may have serious implications on a central office administrator's emotional and physical well-being and impact overall ability and capacity to affect timely change.

Benefits and challenges. Prioritizing the emotional complexities and demands of turnaround work for central office administrators is essential when supporting marginalized students. By paying attention to feelings of frustration, focusing on cohesion among central office administrators, and understanding the emotional toll that turnaround work creates, central office administrators may be able to identify and execute best practices and better meet the needs of marginalized students. One major challenge that central office administrators faced was the inability to carve out time to support professional and personal wellbeing due to the extreme demands of the turnaround plan.

Summary. Central office administrators in any turnaround district face an enormous amount of pressure and complexity as they address various issues that impact academic achievement. The three-year turnaround timeline creates urgency in their work, which provokes emotions and actions that influence their work. In this district, three prominent emotions resonated with central office administrators as they organized their work in support of traditionally marginalized populations: frustration; a lack of feeling cohesive among team members; and the emotional toll of this work over time. Frustration was shown in their language, organization, and references to lack of time to address crucial work. A feeling of a lack of cohesion among team members related to some unclear roles, responsibilities, and decision-making authority. Lastly, an emotional toll was seen through the resistance central office administrators faced in a "nearly impossible" job that was combined with a strong will to create an environment of academic success for all students.

Recommendations for Practitioners

In light of current research on turning around low performing school districts and our research findings, we recommend that the central office administrators adopt and implement an improvement process as they work to increase positive outcomes for traditionally marginalized students. We further recommend that the district revise the turnaround plan to encompass two specific aspects: maintain focus on a few targeted teaching and learning goals and clearly define roles and responsibilities for central office administrators. Finally, we recommend that district administrators develop a structure that includes time for self-care. We now discuss these recommendations.

Adopt and Implement an Improvement Process

The district has made efforts to ensure that meetings matter and are productive. However, several central office administrators reported that despite these efforts, meetings got in the way of the "real work," or, they were often "updates on work" that was happening in other departments even when agendas were set and protocols were used. Inevitably, time was the number one barrier to capitalizing on recurring meetings with a consistent group of central office administrators. Therefore, it is critical that the central office team evaluates how they currently utilize meeting time and whether or not they are focusing on using the time together as an opportunity to learn together. The district would benefit from adopting an improvement process and establishing meeting practices that are explicitly related to improvement cycles. This would require the central office team to organize for collaborative work, spend time inquiring about data and current best practices to create a problem of practice, develop an action plan, implement the plan, and assess its effectiveness. While there is a number of improvement processes, the Data Wise Project, based at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, is one process that could be used for this work. Structuring meetings in this way would provide central office administrators the opportunity to negotiate a joint enterprise and support learning that is anchored in practice (Wenger, 1998).

Additionally, implementation of a clear step-by-step improvement process may improve the way district and school meetings are planned and facilitated while creating consistent use of multiple sources of evidence to drive decision making with a focus on supporting a large number of marginalized students in the district. Using a clear process and focusing on student data to identify a problem of practice and improvement strategy will likely increase instructional equity for all students and enable the central office administrative team to better support schools in a

strategic and collaborative manner. This process will also aid in streamlining the benchmark goals and efforts aimed at improving outcomes for all students in the district.

Revise District Turnaround Plan

Effective district leaders focus their efforts on creating goal-oriented districts (Waters & Marzano, 2006). Since 2009, Massachusetts' state system of support, along with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE), has worked collaboratively with turnaround districts to develop evidence-based improvement plans that include targeted benchmark goals. Similar to many districts, the turnaround process in this district began with some formal planning activities that incorporated stakeholder input and ESE guidance and resulted in a turnaround plan with many benchmarks. While an effort was made to reduce the number of benchmarks, at the time of data collection there were approximately 30 benchmarks toward which the district was working.

Maintain focus on a few teaching and learning goals. Successful district improvement plans allow for a coherent approach to improvement that is sustained over time and does not overload schools with excessive numbers of initiatives (Leithwood, 2013). However, when a district enters into receivership, the stakes are high and the timeline is short, and navigating this pressure can be incredibly challenging. Much of the pressure felt in this district was a result of the combination of excessive goals and benchmarks and a short timeframe in which to reach them. Through identification of essential goals, this pressure may decrease to a point where collective understanding and ownership of work in support of marginalized students increase.

When everything is a priority, nothing is a priority. Reducing the number of district benchmarks may enable the district to guide their improvement efforts on explicit well-established frameworks. While there was a shared understanding and appreciation of the

turnaround goals and benchmarks, there was limited evidence of collective or shared work across central office administrators in the district. By negotiating the highest leverageable teaching and learning goals for the marginalized students served in the district and focusing efforts on making progress towards the agreed upon goals, central office administrators will be more likely to work collaborativelly and build collective knowledge to impact practice in the district.

Develop explicit roles, expectations, and responsibilities. Among all school-related factors that contribute to school learning outcomes, leadership is second only to classroom instruction (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). In this study, central office administrators reported confusion regarding their roles and decision making authority. The lack of clear processes and structures created frustration and confusion among central office administrators. Clearly defined roles, expectations, and responsibilities for members of the central office leadership team, including a process for determining membership and distributed decision making authority, will allow the district to maximize the knowledge, skills, and motivation of each member. If this happens, it has the potential to accelerate improved outcomes for marginalized students.

As the district worked to improve outcomes for marginalized students, several shifts in the organizational structure of the central office team were made. Development and maintenance of a consistent leadership team will play a role in achieving the outcomes outlined in the district's signature benchmarks and goals. While the changes in the district were meant to increase productivity, efficiency, and impact outcomes, and appeared to be largely positive, there may be unintended consequences related to roles, responsibilities, and decision-making authority. Once roles have been clearly defined, the district should distribute decision-making authority across central office administrators. The district may also consider establishing decision making

committees with representation from various stakeholder groups, administrators, teachers, students, parents/guardians, and community members, for important or significant decisions to ensure that new initiatives are integrated with existing routines and practices.

Develop a Structure that Includes Time for Self-Care

Finally, central office administrators in turnaround districts face an enormous amount of emotional pressure as they address the various issues that have impacted the achievement of marginalized populations. The importance of making space for self-care and honoring the emotional aspect of doing the work is key to success in supporting marginalized student populations. Providing time to meet with colleagues to support each other, share work, and celebrate success will go a long way. In addition, devoting protected time to talk about the challenges in turnaround work is equally important in promoting emotional wellness and supporting self-care.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

There are several limitations to this case study. First, although this case has provided insight into the work of central office administrators in a district in need of accelerated improvement, it is a case study of one district, which limits the generalizability of findings. We relied on data collected from semi-structured interviews with central office administrators and did not include any other district level or school level leaders. Exploration of the whole network would better represent the connections, collaboration, and language use between school leaders and central office administrators. Analyzing building level perceptions would provide additional insight into policy interpretation and implementation as well. Existing research confirms that the presence of powerful, effective school leadership is essential to turning around failing schools. Further research should include the role of the principal in a turnaround district in order to better

understand how their work is organized and distributed in conjunction with central office administration.

Second**,** this study was conducted in November of 2017, two years after the district entered into receivership and one year after the Receiver requested permission to modify the district's turnaround plan. Data collected from nine semi-structured interviews, document review and one observation led the research team to the key findings and recommendations. We recognize that this was a moment in time and that the district has many organizational and structural improvements in motion. Future research could include exploration of multiple turnaround districts in Massachusetts over time. These longitudinal studies may allow us to examine the interaction between and among internal (district and school level) and external partners (ESE, consultants, community agencies, etc.) and the effectiveness of the implementation of turnaround strategies resulting in outcomes over time.

To determine the influence of district superintendents on student achievement and turnaround strategy, additional research might focus more directly on the role of the Receiver/Superintendent. Waters and Marzano (2006) found the correlation between superintendent tenure and student achievement to be statistically significant (.19) which suggests that the length of time a superintendent remains in a district positively correlates with positive student outcomes. Understanding the impact high stakes accountability has on one person charged with leading and organizing the work may provide insight into turnaround timelines and strategies for improving student outcomes in districts that are deemed as chronically underperforming.

Conclusion

American schools are becoming more diverse at a time when achievement and equity gaps continue to persist, contributing to the marginalization of certain populations of students. In order to address these gaps, central office administrators may focus their collective reform work on supporting traditionally marginalized student populations. Especially in districts in turnaround status or state receivership, the ways in which central office administrators organize their work in support of traditionally marginalized populations is a critical, yet understudied research topic.

This qualitative case study explored how central office administrators in one mid-size turnaround district organized their work to support traditionally marginalized students. By analyzing collaboration, language, policy implementation, and social ties, this study concluded that central office administrators in one district organized their work in support of marginalized populations in the following ways: (1) central office administrators attempted to scaffold turnaround policy; (2) central office administrators were part of an evolving organizational structure with changing organizational structures; and (3) there is an emotional component to the work of supporting traditionally marginalized students in this district. Each of these findings illuminated benefits and challenges for the district in their support of marginalized students.

Overall, this study recommends that central office administrators implement a more focused improvement strategy to guide their collective work in support of marginalized students. Specifically, this improvement strategy should define clear roles and responsibilities for each central office administrator, maintain a focus on teaching and learning goals, and develop meeting structures designed to improve student outcomes. While this study attempted to address a research gap by investigating how central office administrators organize their work in support

of marginalized students, it may serve as a catalyst for future studies to systematically identify work practices that address school reform in the name of closing equity and achievement gaps.

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Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Introduction

"Thank you for taking time from your busy schedule to talk with me today. I am here to learn about the turnaround work your district is doing to better support marginalized students. As a district leader, you are in a unique position to help us understand this important work and we greatly appreciate your participation in this study. The interview will consist of a set of questions about your background, relationships and collaboration, and the specific work in which central office administrators are engaged.

The aim of this study is to better understand how the central office administrators in Holyoke organize their work in support of marginalized student populations. As we learn about your district we plan to analyze the interview data collected through four lenses: collaboration, policy implementation, communication, and social networks.

I want to let you know that throughout the course of this study, I will work to preserve confidentiality. We will not use your name or reveal other identifying information in study publications. At any time during this interview, you may choose not to answer a question or to stop the interview. Before we begin, please read this consent form and if you agree, sign it. Feel free to ask me any question about the study."

Signing of consent form

"For the purposes of accuracy, I'd like to record this conversation. Do you provide consent for me to record?"

"From time to time, you may see me jotting some notes on this paper for my own reference."

"Before we begin, do you have any questions about the study?"

Question Categorical Codes

BQ = Background Questions	**PI = Policy Implementation**
OAQ = Overarching Questions	**C = Communication**
COL = Collaboration	**SN = Social Networks**

Sample Questions and Possible Prompts

"To get started, please state your name and your position in the district"

Background

1. Tell me about your work and your experiences here in the district? **(BQ)**
    a. *Possible Probe: What are the primary responsibilities in your role?*
    b. *Possible Probe: What is your educational and work background?*
    c. *Possible Probe: What motivations/values inform or ground your work?*

2. When did you join the district and why? **(BQ)**
    a. *Probe: What do value most about working here?*

3. What are some district goals that are related to improving outcomes for historically marginalized populations?**(OAQ, C, PI, COL)**
    a. ***Probe:*** *How do district leaders work together to establish goals?* **(PI, COL)**

4. How are turnaround priorities communicated? **(OAQ, C, PI, COL)**

5. Some policies that we work on in education happen as a result of external pressure, either from state or national agencies. Other policies are internally driven by the people working directly in the district or the community. What internal and external policies are you currently focusing on? **(PI, C, COL)**
    a. *Possible Probe: How and why did you decide to enact these specific policies?*
    b. *Possible Probe: How do external policy demands fit or not fit with your local district goal*s?
    c. *Possible Probe*: *How do external policy demands fit or not with your personal values and beliefs about goals for schools, districts, and traditionally marginalized and underserved students?*

6. How do you and your colleagues work together to implement these policies? **(PI, C, COL)**
    a. *Possible Probe: How and why did you decide to enact these specific policies?*
    b. *Possible Probe: How do external policy demands fit or not fit with your local district goal*s?
    c. *Possible Probe*: *How do external policy demands fit or not with your personal values and beliefs about goals for schools, districts, and traditionally marginalized and underserved students?*

7. How do you and your colleagues in the central office work to balance external policy demands with internal goals? **(PI)**
    a. *Possible Probe: How have you adapted or reshaped external policy demands to fit your internal district goals?*
    b. *Possible Probe: How do you work with building level leaders to negotiate this fit and navigate possible tensions?*

8. What are the ways that you talk in the district about underserved or marginalized students? **(C)** or What language or discourse do you use when you talk about or discuss underserved or marginalized students? How does the discourse vary according to the audience?
    a. *Possible Probe: What kinds of language does the district use?*
    b. *Possible Probe: What message do you think underserved or marginalized students hear?* **(C)**
    c. *Possible Probe: Why, tell me more?*
    d. *Possible Probe: What message do you think underserved or marginalized families hear?* **(C)**
    e. *Possible Probe: Why, tell me more?*
    f. *Possible Probe: What message do you think teachers hear?* **(C)**

Relational Ties/Collaboration

9. With whom do you work with and/or interact with on a day-to-day basis? **(SN)**
    a. ***Probe:*** *How often do you interact (people stated in answer) - daily, weekly, monthly?*
    b. *Who do you turn to most on the central office leadership team? How often?*

10. Who are the people [internal and external] to whom you turn for advice related to the district's goals and efforts? **(SN, PI, C, COL)**

11. *Who are the [internal and external] people who turn to you for advice related to the* district's goals and efforts?
    Note: *for each relational tie determine closeness, duration, and frequency to determine the strength of tie.*

12. Share a time when you needed professional advice about your work tied to supporting marginalized students in the district? Why did you decide [internal or external] to seek advice? **(SN, C)**

Collaboration

13. We know from reading the turnaround plan that professional collaboration is a priority area. What does this look like at the central office? **(COL)**

14. When collaborating with central office colleagues, what processes or strategies would you say work well or support your efforts to collaborate? **(COL)**

15. What are some challenges you face when collaborating with central office colleagues? **(COL)**
    a. *Possible Probe: How might your current collaborative structure be improved?*

16. Provide a few examples of what you have done to build the capacity of the schools in order to better support marginalized populations? (**COL, C)**
    a. *Possible Probe: Of the processes or strategies you have tried, what has worked effectively? Why have these strategies or processes worked? What has not worked and why?*
    b. *Possible Probe: What efforts have been abandoned or are unsustainable?*

Closing Remarks

17. Is there anything else you would like to share? Is there anything else that I should know?

"Thank you for your time and participation in this study. Our plan is to interview each member of the leadership team. Again, all of the data collected and everything you said will be kept confidential. Over the next few months, we will be analyzing the data. If I have other questions, is it okay for me to contact you to schedule additional time? After we generate our findings for the study, we plan to share them with the district. Likely this will occur in the early spring."

Appendix B

Pre-Observation Checklist

Observation Checklist (Creswell, 2013, p. 217)			
	Did you gain permission to study this site?		Will you develop rapport with individuals at the site?
	Do you know your role as the observer?		Will your observation change from broad to narrow?
	Do you have a means for recording field notes such as an observational protocol?		Will you take limited notes at first?
	Do you know what you will observe first?		Will you take both descriptive as well as reflective field notes?
	Will you enter and leave the site slowly, so as not to disturb the setting?		Will you describe in complete sentences so that you have detailed field notes?
	Will you make multiple observations over time?		Did you thank our participants at the site?

Appendix C

Observation Protocol

Observation Field notes:		Date:
Setting:		
Participants (if applicable):		
Observer:		Role of Observer:
Start Time:		End Time:
Time	**Descriptive Notes**	**Reflective Notes** (insights, hunches, themes)

Appendix D

Interview Protocol Refinement: Phase 1

Phase 1: Ensure interview questions are aligned with research question of whole DIP and individual research studies.

Check the box to map the interview questions to the research topics/questions.

	Background	Overarching	Collaboration	Policy Implementation	Communication	Social Networks
Question 1						
Question 2						
Question 3						
Question 4						
Question 5						
Question 6						
Question 7						
Question 8						
Question 9						
Question 10						
Question 11						
Question 12						

Appendix E

Interview Protocol Refinement: Feedback on the Interview Protocol

Mark yes or no for each item depending on whether you see that item present in the interview protocol. Provide feedback in the last column for items that can be improved.

Aspects of an Interview Protocol replicated from Castillo-Montoya, 2016, p. 825	**Yes**	**No**	**Feedback for Improvement**
Interview Protocol Structure			
Beginning questions are factual in nature			
Key questions are majority of the questions and are placed between beginning and ending questions			
Questions at the end of interview protocol are reflective and provide participant an opportunity to share closing comments			
A brief script throughout the interview protocol provides smooth transitions between topic areas			
Interviewer closes with expressed gratitude and any intents to stay connected or follow up			
Overall, interview is organized to promote conversational flow			
Writing of Interview Questions & Statements			
Questions/statements are free from spelling error(s)			
Only one question is asked at a time			
Most questions ask participants to describe experiences and feelings			
Questions are mostly open ended			
Questions are written in a non-judgmental manner			
Length of Interview Protocol			
All questions are needed Questions/statements are concise			
Comprehension			
Questions/statements are devoid of academic language			